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The Junior Cycle Curriculum: For All or For Some?

Paper delivered by Aine Hyland, Education Dept., University College, Dublin at the I.A.C.D. Conference entitled

A New Curriculum at Junior Cycle: Catering for All Abilities

held in Carysfort College on 7th and 8th October 1988.

Outline of Paper:

In this paper I propose to address the issue of the junior cycle curriculum under the following headings:
1. The Historical Origins of the Junior Cycle Curriculum in Ireland and developments in the early years of the Free State
2. Changes after the Second World War
3. Developments in the past 25 years
4. Reports of the Curriculum and Examinations Board
5. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the new syllabi for the Junior Certificate Examination.

1. Historical Origins of the Junior Cycle Curriculum

Post-primary education in Ireland has traditionally distinguished between secondary education, of an academic/classical type and vocational education of a technical/practical type. While secondary education has been provided by private bodies or individuals for many centuries, it is little more than 100 years ago that the state first formally became involved in education at this level.

Until relatively recently, most young people attended only primary school - secondary education being the prerogative of the affluent who could afford to pay fees and the very small number of very bright children who won scholarships. Consequently, the curriculum of secondary schools was developed in the context of applying to only a minority of the population and the question of "catering for all abilities" was not an issue until very recently.

Secondary / Intermediate Education

State involvement in secondary education in Ireland dates back to 1878. With the passing of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act in that year, a system of grant aid linked to an examination system was inaugurated. Under this system, results fees were paid to schools on the basis of the results of their pupils at annual examinations. There were originally three examinations - junior, middle and senior grades. In 1892, a fourth examination was added - preparatory grade - but this was dropped in 1913. The examination syllabi for these examinations (which lasted until 1924) largely determined the curriculum of secondary schools and we have inherited this tradition of an exam dominated curriculum. In the period before Independence, the examination subjects were arranged in seven divisions as follows: Greek, Latin, English, modern languages, mathematics, natural sciences, music and drawing. During the early years of the system, subjects such as English and the classics received the most favourable mark weighting and the highest results fees.[1] This gave a "grammar school" or academic-type bias to the secondary school programme which persisted until 1924 and which influenced the development of secondary education in the Free State until the 1960's. In the early years of the system, less than 10% of the appropriate age-cohort attended secondary school.

After 1922, the curriculum of secondary schools in the Irish Free State underwent significant change. Under the Intermediate Education (Amendment) Act of 1924, the three grades of results examination were abolished and they were replaced by two certificate examinations - the Intermediate and the Leaving Certificates. To obtain a pass in the Intermediate Certificate examination, a pupil had to pass five subjects which had to include the following: (1) Irish or English; (2) a language other than that taken at (1); (3) Mathematics or (for girls only) arithmetic

with any one of science, domestic science or music, (4) history and geography. From 1929 onwards, pupils also had to pass Irish in order to pass the intermediate certificate.[2]

Another innovation introduced by the new state was the entrance examination for primary school pupils. Pupils who wished to attend a secondary school had to pass such a test "to satisfy the Dept. that he is sufficiently advanced in knowledge and in intelligence to follow with reasonable success a course in secondary education".[3] Following the introduction of the Primary Certificate examination in 1929 (it subsequently became compulsory for all national school pupils in 1943) pupils who passed this examination were exempt from the entrance exam. Implicit in the entrance exam. requirement was the assumption that only pupils of higher academic ability should be accepted in secondary schools and the syllabi for the various secondary school subjects were developed on this assumption.

Vocational / Technical Education

The Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act of 1899 marked the beginning of state aid to technical education in Ireland. Traditionally, throughout the world, those who wished to enter a trade became apprenticed to an experienced tradesman or craftsperson - technical training did not take place in a formal "school" environment until the 19th century and it was not until the very end of the century that state aid became available in Ireland for such training. Even then, most of the pupils attended technical classes on a part-time or "block-release" basis and it was not until after the foundation of the new state that general education (as opposed to technical training) took place in technical schools. The Vocational Education Act of 1930 distinguished between continuation education and technical education and in the act, continuation education was seen "to continue and supplement education provided in elementary schools and to include general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades etc."[4] Until 1947, the curriculum in vocational and technical schools was largely determined locally and there was no central examination for vocational school pupils.

2. Changes after the Second World War

Education throughout the world has often benefitted as a result of major wars. Countries whose infrastrucure - physical, social and economic- has been devastated by war, find themselves faced with a major reconstruction effort after the war is over. Historically, one finds that such countries ask fundamental question about their education systems during this reconstruction period and very often significant developments occur as a result of such questioning. In the United Kingdom after the Second World War, the question of equality of educational opportunity became a major issue. The 1944 Education Act in England and the 1947 Act in N.I. introduced free second-level education for all - although in keeping with contemporary views of different "measurable" ability levels among young people, such education was strictly segregated between academic/ grammar school education and secondary modern/vocational-type education. "Ability" was tested at the end of primary school by the 11 plus exam and a child's educational future was determined by his/her performance at this exam.

In Ireland around the same period, questions were being raised about the limitations of the education system. In 1947, the I.N.T.O published a "Plan for Education" in which the curricula of both primary and second level schools were criticised.[5] They were seen as too narrow and bookish, with an undue emphasis on academic performance. The I.N.T.O felt that

> "education should be a preparation for complete life. It should cater not only for man's economic needs, but also for his individual personal needs - spiritual, mental, physical - and also for his needs as a member of a community and as a citizen of the State. It is concerned primarily with human beings, rather than subjects, and its aim should be development and enrichment of the whole human personality".

The I.N.T.O. argued that the school-leaving age should be raised to 16; that there should be a review of "the content and technique of all education, primary and post-primary" and held that "there must be a fusion of the present divergent systems into one integrated system.....". In a chapter entitled "The Curriculum up to 16" it was argued that all children should study Music,

Drama, Art, Science, Physical Training and some form of manual training as well as the more traditional subjects such as Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Religion and Civics.

The I.N.TO's views on a broad curriculum for pupils from 4 to 16 were echoed in a report/memorandum which was prepared during the same period by a committee within the Department of Education.[7] This committee was chaired by the Secretary of the Department, L. O Muirthe and made recommendations "for the reorganisation of the educational system to meet a raising of the school-leaving age". The proposals were based on the fundamental recommendation that school attendance would be compulsory up to the age of 15 and ultimately to 16. The committee recommended that a new type of school to be known as a "Senior School" should be set up. (These schools would be similar to the newly set-up Secondary Modern Schools in England). Senior schools would be "subject to ecclesiastical sanction" and would provide a broader and a less academic curriculum than the Secondary Schools. The Secondary schools would continue to provide a grammar/academic education for those who were suited to such an education but it was recommended that some practical subjects should be included in the secondary schools curriculum. Other pupils would transfer from the National schools (which would be renamed " Junior Schools") to the new Senior Schools at about the age of 12. The committee held the view that pupils in this age group should continue to follow a broadly based curriculum and a broad curriculum framework was recommended for pupils in the proposed new Senior Schools.

In spite of the fact that forces both within and outside the Dept. of Education recommended major reform of our education system, such reform did not occur. The only significant development of the period was the introduction in 1947 of the Group Certificate Examination to be taken by pupils in Vocational Schools at the end of a two year continuation course.

The government's response to the call for major reform of the education system was to set up a Council of Education in 1950. The Council deliberated for 10 years before completing its report on the Curriculum of the Secondary School, and the report itself was not published until 1963, by which time events had overtaken its recommendations. The overall thrust of the report was conservative; it did not advocate a scheme of free secondary education since it regarded such a proposal as "utopian" and "impracticable for financial reasons no less than on educational grounds".[8] (At this stage, about 25% of the relevant age-group sat the Intermediate Certificate exam). However, on specifically curricular issues the report had some valuable advice. It recommended that "the junior cycle curriculum should be planned as a unit in itself, since it completes the general education of a considerable number of those who attend secondary schools". It also stated that "a greater degree of harmony and co-ordination between the various branches of instruction is indispensable if the aim of general education is to be achieved." It addressed the question of a desirable core curriculum for pupils and while failing to come to any decisive conclusion on this issue it appeared generally to favour a broader and more balanced curriculum then was then the norm.

No significant changes were made in either the primary or secondary curricula as a result of the reports of the Council of Education. The school sytem continued to be a segregated one - at the end of primary school, a pupil's future was effectively determined; s/he either left school altogether, or entered a vocational school where the only outcome could be the Group Cert. (after a two year course); or entered a secondary school where the possibility of the Inter. Cert, the Leaving Cert and subsequent Third Level education was opened up. The Investment in Education report in the mid-1960's found that 56% of our young people left full-time education without a junior cycle certificate - either a Group Cert or an Inter Cert.[9] In a country which in the 1960s believed that investment in education was investment in the future of the country, this was an issue which would have to be adressed. The report also found many shortcomings in the curriculum at all levels. The curriculum of the majority of second-level schools was very limited. In boys' secondary schools, a considerable amount of time was devoted to Classics, with 95% of boys taking Latin for the Intermediate Certificate. Very few boys studied modern languages. Science and Mathematics, particularly at higher level, were taken by very few girls and in general, very little time was spent on aesthetic and practical subjects.

3. Developments in the past 25 Years (1963 - 1988).

During the late sixties and early seventies, many changes occurred in Irish education. The rigid barriers which had existed between secondary and vocational education were removed in the early 1960's when pupils in vocational schools were allowed to sit the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations; capital grants were made available for the building of secondary schools in 1964; the first comprehensive schools were opened in 1965; free post-primary education was introduced in 1967; the school-leaving age was raised to 15 in 1972; and by the early 1970's, the numbers of pupils in second-level schools had grown very significantly.[10] (The total numbers attending second-level education have almost trebled in the past twenty years). Many of the subject syllabi at second-level were revised and in 1971 a radical new primary curriculum was introduced.

The Primary School Curriculum, 1971.

The new primary curriculum echoed many of the recommendations of earlier reports, specifically the INTO Plan for Education and the report of the Council of Education. It was a broadly-based, child-centred curriculum, which recognised that "the young child is not conscious of subject barriers; he views knowledge as a key to life and his questions concerning the world around him range over the whole field of knowledge". It was pointed out that "the curriculum should reflect this attitude of the child". The necessity of curricular continuity between primary and post-primary education was also emphasised: "The child's education should be an organic development and should not involve a significant change of method and matter for him in passing form one stage to the next, from one class to the next or from the primary to the post-primary school."[11] However, no radical reappraisal of the second-level curriculum as a whole was undertaken during the 1970's - although virtually 100% of an age-cohort now transferred automatically to second-level schools, compared to less than two-thirds of a cohort before free education had been introduced. Many people felt that a curriculum which had originally been designed for the more academically oriented, was not suitable for all young people and that a review particularly of the junior cycle curriculum should be undertaken.

Lack of Continuity between primary and post-primary curricula

Until recently, the three different sectors of education (primary, secondary and vocational) were dealt with by three different branches of the Dept. of Education, each with its own inspectorate, which was responsible for advising the Minister on curricular matters. In the past, there was little or no liaison between those responsible for the development of curricula at the different levels. This resulted in a lack of continuity between the curriculum of the primary and post-primary schoools. The lack of formal continuity between the primary and the secondary curriculum to-day is evident when one compares the curriculum for primary schools as set out in The Primary School Curriculum - Teachers' Handbook, with the curriculum for secondary schools as set out in the present Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools. The 1971 Teachers Handbook articulates a rationale for the primary curriculum and provides guidelines under seven aspects:- Religion; Language; Mathematics; Social and Environmental Studies; Art and Craft Activities; Music; Physical Education. The Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools provides a syllabus for each of the examination subjects at Intermediate and Leaving Certificate levels but it does not articulate a rationale for these subjects nor does it provide a curricular framework within which these subjects are offered. It does however state that the approved course for recognised junior cycle pupils must include the following subjects: Irish; English; Mathematics; History and Geography; Civics and not less than two other subjects from the epproved list of examination subjects. The curriculum "should also include provision for singing and P.E." In vocational and in community and comprehensive schools the formal requirements are different. In fact the only three subjects which are compulsory for all pupils in junior cycle (both those following Group Certificate and those following Intermediate Certificate courses) are Irish, English and Civics. In practice however, virtually all pupils take Mathematics, 95% take History and Geography or an integrated Humanities course, 86% take a Science course, 87% take Physical Education, and almost 72% take French. In addition, 63% of pupils take Commerce, and 47% take Art. A smaller proportion take subjects such as Mechanical Drawing, Woodwork, Music etc.[12]

Most schools provide a reasonably wide range of subjects at junior cycle. All schools provide English, Irish, Maths, History/Geography or Humanities or Environmental Studies; virtually all schools offer a course or courses in Science, 95% offer French, 93% offer Commerce, 80% offer Art, 74% offer Home Economics, 49% offer Music. [13]

There would appear to be a strong case for revising the regulations relating to the junior cycle curriculum to reflect the reality both in terms of the range of subjects being offered by the majority of second-level schools and the choice of subjects being taken by pupils in these schools. It would also appear to be timely to reappraise the context in which these regulations are issued.

We have seen that the role of the Intermediate Board before 1924 in relation to second level curriculum was limited to producing subject syllabi for examination purposes and to setting and marking examination scripts. After 1924, the new state went a little farther than this and required pupils who wished to be awarded the Intermediate or Leaving Certificate to pass in a certain combination of subjects. However, the Dept. of Education has always been cautious about setting out a rationale or a curricular framework for education at this level. In the present edition of Rules and Programme, such a rationale is limited to the following statement: "The purpose of the Intermediate Certificate Course is to provide a well-balanced, general education suitable for pupils who leave full-time education at about 16 years of age or, alternatively, who wish to enter on more advanced courses of study". This caution is a legacy from the last century when the relationship between Church and State in education in Ireland was a delicate one. The Catholic Church authorities were nervous of undue State interference and they fought a steady and successful battle to protect the autonomy and independence of their secondary schools. Individual schools themselves almost invariably had (and have) a clearly defined philosophy and ethos (often inherited from their founders) and they feared that if the State articulated a national philosophy of education, it might be at variance with that of individual schools. From the State's point of view, it found itself dealing with a broad spectrum of schools which included schools run by a variety of religious orders (male and female); Diocesan authorities; various Protestant denominations; lay corporate bodies; private individuals and in more recent years, the Jewish authorities. It may well have been felt that it was better to avoid the issue of devising a national curricular framework than to incur the wrath of one or other of the school authorities. I believe however, that with the present decision to replace the Intermediate and Group Certificate examinations by a unified Junior Certifiacte examination, it is timely that this question should be addressed.

Philosophical justification for a broadly-based curriculum

Philosophers throughout the ages have supported the theory that there are different forms of knowledge - these included early Greek and Roman philosophers and later philosophers and educators such as John Henry Newman, Maritain, Phenix, Lonergan and Hirst.[14] Paul Hirst refers to seven Forms of Knowledge; Maritain has four degrees of knowledge; Phenix has six realms of meaning; Lonergan writes of ten differentiations of consciousness. It has been pointed out that "there is a remarkable convergence in the principle that human knowledge is not a uniform thing, that there exist varieties of human knowing and that the full development of a human being requires that all of his knowing capacities be exercised".[15] One could argue that if the primary aim of education is the development of the whole person, then education should contribute to the development of all aspects of the person - affective, emotional and moral and physical as well as cognitive and intellectual.

Those who approach curriculum planning from the point of view of cultural analysis come to a similar conclusion. Denis Lawton suggests that there are good anthropological and sociological reasons for sub-dividing the cultural system into the following eight structures or sub-systems:[15]

1. social structure / social system
2. economic system
3. communication system
4. rationality system
5. technology system
6. morality system
7. belief system
8. aesthetic system.

Lawton argues that a satisfactory educational programme must pass on the essentials of the eight systems, unless there are other agencies within society better equipped for that aspect of cultural transmission.

The situation in other countries

Since compulsory education to the age of 15/16 has become a statutory requirement, education authorities in most Western countries suggest that a broad non-specialised curriculum be followed by pupils at junior cycle level. The core curriculum in most European countries contains the following subjects: the mother tongue, mathematics/ arithmetic, physical education, expressive arts, human and social sciences and natural sciences. Some, but not all of these countries include a foreign language, technology and/or practical studies in the core.

In England, in a publication entitled "The Curriculum from 5 to 16", the inspectorate stresses that "there is a need for unity of purpose throughout the 5 to 16 age span". Here it is stated that the curriculum should aim to be broad and balanced and it is sugggested that the curriculum of all schools should involve pupils in each of the following eight areas of learning and experience: aesthetic and creative; human and social; linguistic and literary; mathematical; moral; physical; scientific; spiritual; technological.[16] Recent decisions incorporated in the Education Reform Bill define a National Curriculum which is somewhat different to the above but which nevertheless retains many of the elements contained in the Inspectors' recommendations. The Foundation subjects in the National Curriculum in England and Wales are English; Maths; Combined Sciences; Technology; Modern Foreign Language; History/Geography; Art/Music/Drama/Design; and P.E.[17] In Northern Ireland within the past few days, the Secretary of State for Education has announced that the Common Curriculum there will include, in addition to Religious Education, six areas of study as follows: English; Mathematics; Science and Technology; The Environment and Society; Creative and Expressive Studies; and Language Studies (secondary schools only).[18] (Each area of study may comprose more than one subject). Similarly, in Scotland, the recently introduced common curriculum for pupils in junior cycle, requires pupils to experience the following seven curricular "modes": Linguistic and Literary Studies; Creative and Aesthetic Studies; Mathematical Studies; Physical Activity and Leisure; Religious and Moral Studies; Scientific Studies; Social Studies.[19] Perhaps the most significant change which has been introduced throughout the United Kingdom has been the abolition of the "bipartite" system of examinations at the end of junior cycle (e.g. the G.C.E. and the C.S.E. in England and Wales) and their replacement by a single unified examination for all pupils (the G.C.S.E. in England). Similar moves have been made in other countries of the European Community to remove the "apartheid" that has traditionally existed between pupils of different abilities.

4. Reports of the Curriculum and Examinations Board in Ireland

With the setting up of the interim Curriculum and Examinations Board in Ireland in January 1984, the Minister for Education, Ms. Gemma Hussey indicated that the time was ripe for a fundamental review of the curriculum at second level. The terms of reference of the Board laid particular stress on the need for a review of the junior cycle curriculum and the Board was specifically asked by the Minister "to make recommendations regarding a new unified assessment system for the junior cycle of second level schooling" - a new system which "should take account of the range of pupils abilities."[20] Much of the work of the Board during the first two years of its existence focussed on this area. A considerable amount of the time of the Joint Committee which produced recommendations on the junior cycle curriculum was spent discussing and getting agreement on a basis for overall curriculum reform. In a consultative document "Issues and Structures in Education" a possible junior cycle framework was suggested.[21] This framework, while deriving from an analysis of the Irish situation and based on Irish needs, bore many similarities to other European models. Recognising the need for a broad junior cycle curriculum, it presented the curriculum under eight categories - Communication, language and literature; Creative and Aesthetic Studies; Guidance and Counselling; Mathematical Studies; Physical Education; Religious Education; Science and the New Technologies; Social and Political Studies - distinguishing within each category between subjects or courses which would constitute a core curriculum and those which might be offered as additional contributions.

Some of those who responded to the document felt that the model was too rigid. It was argued that any attempt to categorise subjects in this way failed to recognise the inherent breadth of so many subjects and the extent to which these subjects could contribute to many areas of experience. Some respondents felt that a nationally recommended curricular framework should take into account the present financial constraints and scarcity of resources. Respondents generally

favoured a broad curriculum at junior cycle but felt that the framework should recognise the reality of the situation in Ireland, in particular the fact that some schools would not be in a position to offer all the subjects that had been suggested in the core. In March 1986, the Board published its revised junior cycle curricular framework, which it recommended for general adoption, in the publication "In Our Schools".[22] In this framework the notion of a common core curriculum was approached "from two essential and complementary perspectives". The Board recommended that the junior cycle curriculum of all schools should involve pupils in each of the following areas of experience: Arts education; Guidance and Counselling; Language and Literature (a) Irish and English and (b) other languages; Mathematical Studies; Physical Education; Religious Education; Science and Technology; Social, Political and Environmental Studies - while at the same time including the following four key elements of learning - knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes. The document recognised that many of the traditional subjects can and do contribute to more than one area of experience and that schools which might not have the resources to offer a large number of subjects or courses could nevertheless provide a wide range of experiences for their pupils by fully exploiting the potential of the subjects which they were in a position to offer. Minimum and maximum time allocations for the different areas of experience were suggested. The suggested time framework left considerable discretion to schools in the implementation of a broad curriculum - almost 25% of the time is discretionery and could be used by different schools and by different pupils in different ways.

The document *In Our Schools* was presented to the Minister in March 1986 and it was confidently expected that the recommendations of the Interim Board, particularly in relation to the junior cycle framework would be accepted and implemented. At that time, it was anticipated that the Board would shortly be given statutory powers and that it would take over responsibility for examinations. The Interim Board set up Boards of Studies to consider the different "Categories" or "Areas of Experience" and to produce a coherent and co-ordinated rationale and aims for the different subjects within these areas. The reports of three of these Boards (Arts; Languages and Social, Political and Environmental Education) were made publicly available in September 1987 [23] and Course Committees were then set up to develop subject syllabi within the context of the reports of these Boards of Studies. However, before these Committees had an opportunity to undertake this work, the Interim C.E.B. was disbanded.

5. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the new syllabi for the Junior Certificate Examination.

The setting up of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment by the present Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, in December last, marked a new phase in the thrust for curricular reform. When launching the Council, the Minister asked it to proceed as a matter of urgency with planning the introduction of the new unified system of assessment. She announced that the new certificate would be called the Junior Certificate and that the target date for its introduction would be 1992.[24] However, the powers given to the Council are more limited than the powers that had been envisaged for the statutory C.E.B. Its deliberations are not as open as those of the Interim C.E.B. and its role in relation to primary curriculum is ambiguous in the context of the existence of the Primary Curriculum Review Body. Its Course Committees do not include representation from the primary sector which is disappointing for those of us who saw that development in the earlier Course Committees as being a potential solution to the lack of continuity between the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels. The new Council does not have responsibility for examinations - and in a country which has seen examinations dominate the curriculum for over a century, this is a matter of some concern. However, many of the members of the Council had been members of the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board; many of the members of the new Course Committees set up by the N.C.C.A. had been members of the earlier Course Committees set up by the C.E.B.; the full-time members of the Executive of the N.C.C.A. had previously been the Executive of the C.E.B. and many of the Education Officers who had worked in the context of the C.E.B. continue to work under the new Council. There were grounds for hoping that the work of the new N.C.C.A. would build on the foundation laid by the Interim C.E.B.

The launching last month of 7 new Junior Certificate syllabi confirmed that such optimism was well-founded. Much of what we read in the syllabi is a fulfilment of the aspirations expressed in earlier Board documents. Before commenting, mostly in a positive vein, on the syllabi themselves, I would like to make some less positive comments. Lest there be any confusion among members of the audience here, what was launched last month were separate syllabi for

seven of the subjects of the junior cycle - Art, Craft, & Design; Business Studies; English; Gaeilge; Geography; History; Science. I think it would be accurate to state that the reason that these seven syllabi were launched was because they were ready. As far as I am aware, the launching of these seven subjects rather than any other siubjects is not a statement of their relative importance within the junior cycle curriculum. Nor are these seven subjects in any sense "core subjects". Work is well advanced on other syllabi and a new Maths. syllabus was circulated within the past year.

This brings me to my first point of concern- the syllabi were launched "in a vacuum', i.e. they were not announced in the context of a rationale for the new examination nor within an overall curricular framework for the junior cycle. This is less than satisfactory from an educational point of view - a bit like the Grin without the Cheshire Cat! However, the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools for the school-year 1989/90 and subsequent years will have to be revised to take account of the new unified examination and this will provide the opportunity to articulate a rationale and to provide an appropriate curricular framework. I hope this will be done. My second point of concern relates to the question of assessment and examination. Under the proposal for a statutory C.E.B., responsibility for both curriculum and examination would have been vested in the statutory Board. In the present situation, the N.C.C.A. has been responsible for producing these new syllabi, but the examination of the syllabi will be a matter for the Dept. of Education. One hopes that there will be a unity of purpose between the Course Committees which devised these new syllabi and the Inspectors/Examiners who will be responsible for setting the examintion papers. My third concern relates to in-service. The new syllabi are a major departure from the present junior cycle syllabi. They will present a significant challenge to teachers- a challenge which I have no doubt teachers are willing to face provided the necessary support in the form of in-service is forthcoming. Until now, the proportion of our education budget spent on in-service has been minimal (a total of only half a million pounds out of a budget of over a billion pounds in the current year[25]). No matter what "redeployment" of the present in-service budget takes place, it is difficult to see how it can be sufficient to provide an adequate in-service programme in the context of the proposed major reform. Other possibilities will have to be addressed - the use of Teachers Centres, Colleges of Education and of University Depts of Education (staff and facilities) are among the obvious ones. And mechanisms for ensuring close co-ordination between the N.C.C.A. and all those providing in-service will have to be developed to give a coherence to the whole in-service exercise.

And now for the more positive comments. A close reading of the seven syllabi indicates that they have been developed to a large extent within the context of the curricular recommendations contained in *In Our Schools*. The rationale and aims of the reports of the Boards of Studies have provided co-ordination and coherence for related subjects. So that even though a written overall rationale and framework has not been provided, it is evident that the different Course Committees worked within a coherent background and framework. This is clear from the lay-out of the documents; they each contain clearly articulated aims, specifying these aims under the headings of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes. Assessment objectives are also provided for all of the seven subjects.

It is evident from some of the syllabi that the Course Committees have been influenced by the more successful methodologies and approaches which have been adopted by many primary teachers since the introduction of the New Curriculum. Experiential learning is encouraged; the use of materials which the pupils can relate to is highlighted; a more active approach to learning is suggested; flexibility of content and methodology will be possible. As such, the syllabi will cater for a wider ability range than has been the case in the past. The question of whether the syllabi will cater for the full range of ability will depend on how the syllabi are interpreted by teachers themselves, by text-book publishers and above all by the examination procedures and papers. The potential for catering for all abilities appears to be there - the question is whether this potential will be realised. The gap between primary and secondary curriculum has been considerable narrowed and might eventually be closed, by the suggested syllabi.

The syllabi themselves are exciting and innovative and appear in general to have been developed "taking account of the range of pupil abilities" as Minister Hussey enjoined in 1984. All seven syllabi show signs of being the outcome of a radical reappraisal of the role of that subject in the curriculum; they are not merely updating of content as many previous syllabi revisions were. The Gaeilge Bonnchursa syllabus holds out hope for the large numbers of students (almost one-third of a cohort) for whom learning Irish had in the past been an ongoing experience of failure.[26] At the same time the Ardchursa recognises that many of the pupils use Irish as their

first language, either in the Gaeltacht or in the Galltacht. The syllabus, in encouraging the use of a communicative approach, brings the teaching of Irish into line with other language teaching at post-primary level, making it possible for schools to develop a coherent language policy throughout the school. The radical new approach has implications for primary curriuclum and also for senior cycle curriculum. However, there seems to be general recognition of the need for major reform of Irish teaching at primary school level - perhaps the new junior cycle syllabus contains some solutions for the difficulties being experienced at primary level?

I was particularly excited at the approach adopted in the syllabus for Arts, Craft and Design and in the Science syllabus - of identifying a Core programme and then suggesting a number of extensions or options. This was the approach inherent in the original "Wheel" framework - an approach that might ultimately enable pupils to have access to a wider range of subjects than is possible at present. I know that this is not what is being suggested at this point in these syllabi, but the approach contains possibilities in the longer-term for the more radical framework indicated in *Issues and Structures*. The Business Studies programme also appears to me to be a very exciting programme. The Business for Living component could well be a Core element for all pupils in junior cycle as also could the development of keyboard skills and computer literacy skills. (The old Commerce programme had changed relatively little in almost 100 years, as a comparative analysis of Rules and Programme in 1902 and 1988 shows). The new History and Geography syllabi also appear exciting and interesting and seem to contain possibilities and potential for pupils of wide ranging ability. I would have one caveat about too much emphasis on local studies; since the national schools programme also encourages local studies, some mechanism should be developed to avoid too much repetition of the same materials and methodology from year to year. Local Teachers' Centres might have a role to play here in co-ordinating the work done by different teachers with the same children as they move from class to class.

The English syllabus gives considerable freedom to teachers in the choice of literature for their pupils. As such it is both exciting and daunting. Perhaps the proposed Teachers' Handbook with its further suggestions and ideas will make it less daunting. At this stage, it is the syllabus that I find most difficult to evaluate. There is no doubt that it has great possibilities and potential right across the ability range - time will tell whether this potential will be realised. Those of us who remember (at least historically!) what happened in the 1920s and 1930s with a similar open syllabus in English will know that many teachers at that time felt very insecure with an open programme and they made no objection when set texts were reintroduced by DeValera in the 1940s.

The biggest question which hangs over all of the seven syllabi (as well as the Maths syllabus which was issued earlier) is whether the new examination will reflect the breadth and vision of the syllabi. The setting of suitable examinations will present a major challenge to the Examiners/Inspectors and it is imperative that they do not avoid assessing the newer and more innovative aspects of these syllabi. There must be continued co-operation between the members of the Course Committees and the Examiners /Inspectors to ensure that the new Junior Certificate Examination will reflect the imagination and the vision embodied in these new syllabi.

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