

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

15 October 1996

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Report No 821/96

**HIGHER STILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this Report is to advise the Education Committee of the current round of consultation exercises being undertaken by the Higher Still Development Unit and of the arrangements being made to involve Angus Council staff in these exercises. The Report also highlights current policy in relation to the involvement of staff in Higher Still initiatives and requests that the Committee approve limited amendments to that policy.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- i notes the current policy in respect of staff involvement in the Higher Still Programme.
- ii notes and endorses the arrangements which have been set in place to involve staff in consultations about and in the preparation of responses to the current series of consultation documents being issued by the Higher Still Development Unit.
- iii approves the proposal that the policy with respect to the involvement of staff in Higher Still initiatives be amended to allow staff to participate in planning and co-ordination exercises as discussed in the report.
- iv confirms that while there is a commitment to involve staff in consultation and planning initiatives, the Committee recognises the outstanding resource and workload issues relating to the implementation of Higher Still.
- v instructs me to report further to the Committee on the outcomes of the current round of consultation exercises.

## **BACKGROUND**

In March 1994, the Scottish Office issued "Higher Still - Opportunity for All". This document, itself a response to the Howie Committee's review of the upper secondary curriculum, proposed detailed reforms of post-16 education in Scotland and established the Higher Still Development Programme.

Following concerns about the timescale for implementation of the programme, the Secretary of State announced, in August 1995, his decision to delay the introduction of Higher Still courses until session 1998-99. This one year delay he envisaged being used both to allow more extensive consultation and to enable authorities and schools to devote further time to implementing the 5-14 Development Programme.

Between September and December 1995 the Higher Still Development Programme undertook an extensive national consultation exercise. Angus staff were involved in nationally organised seminars and thereafter in local follow-up meetings organised to allow responses to be made to a wide range of documents which addressed subject-specific and whole school issues.

Responses to last autumn's consultation exercise have been taken into account in a second series of consultation documents which were issued in the period May-September 1996. As was the case previously, consultation seminars have been arranged nationally. Responses to this second series of documents are to be submitted by the end of October 1996 for documents issued in May/June and by December 1996 for documents to be issued in September.

Arrangements have been made to allow Angus teachers together with appropriate members of the Educational Development Service to attend each national seminar. Plans are also in place to hold follow-up seminars locally, with a view to preparing responses to the consultative documents.

Following the close of the current period of consultation in December, the Higher Still Development Unit proposes to organise a series of local planning activities the purpose of which is to allow local authority staff to identify the level and nature of the resources and support required to implement Higher Still. The Unit also intends to provide a series of information leaflets for parents, elected members and the business community.

## **HIGHER STILL - THE CURRENT POSITION IN ANGUS**

The policy of Tayside Regional Council, having regard to issues of funding, resourcing and teachers' workload was that teachers and officers of the Education Department could take part in Higher Still consultation initiatives but would not undertake development work whether at school or authority level. The Committee will be aware that the policies of Tayside Regional Council have been adopted subject to the need for review and updating.

The first Angus Council Education Development Plan indicates the Authority's commitment to set up mechanisms to disseminate information and to respond to consultation about post-16 curricular developments.

As indicated above, arrangements have now been made to enable staff to participate in national and local seminars in order to prepare responses to the range of subject-specific and whole school proposals currently being issued for consultation. Staff nominated to represent the authority in national seminars include JCC nominees.

Costs incurred by staff participating in national and local meetings will be partially met from the Authority's 1996-97 SOEID Specific Grant allocation in respect of Higher Still.

## **PROPOSED INVOLVEMENT IN POST-CONSULTATION INITIATIVES**

It is recognised that the immediate task facing schools and the authority is the construction of a local response to the latest series of consultative documents. However, it is clear that following the current consultation exercise, which ends in December 1996 the Higher Still Development Unit will seek to work with local authorities in an effort to co-ordinate and plan its responses to the views of teachers, schools and authorities about the resource, support, and training needs implied by the proposals which are currently the subject of national consultation.

As the implementation target date of August 1998 draws near, it will be important to ensure that the Council and its staff have the opportunity to inform and influence the national debate about resources, support materials and training needs. The Council's contribution to the debate would be able to reflect any on-going concerns about funding, workload or proposed implementation strategies.

The current policy could be interpreted as precluding the involvement of staff in activities designed to analyse specific resource needs, or to advise on the range and content of possible support materials. This interpretation would also prevent Angus staff having access to regional or national groups set up to consider issues arising from implementation studies about specific aspects of Higher Still. It should be noted that the Authority has received for the current financial year a specific grant allocation of £49,000 in respect of Higher Still. This sum is intended to support the involvement of staff in the consultation, co-ordination and planning initiatives referred to above. Support would cover all costs incurred including costs of supply cover for staff participating in these initiatives.

It is therefore proposed that the current policy be amended and clarified as follows:

- teachers and Education Authority staff be allowed to participate voluntarily in activities set up to:
  - i identify appropriate curricular resources
  - ii contribute existing resources to a regional/national resource network
  - iii advise on eventual staff support and training needs and on strategies to meet these needs

- individual schools be allowed to undertake whole school consultation exercises in relation to assessment, core skills, curriculum guidelines and guidance provided that any such exercise has been the subject of due consideration by the school's consultative staff mechanism.
- the outcomes from these activities will be the subject of full consultation with teacher representatives on the JCC as part of an overall needs analysis exercise.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The voluntary involvement of staff in consultation or co-ordination activities will be subject to the Authority's ability to meet any costs incurred from within its Specific Grant allocation for Higher Still.

## **CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Administration have been consulted on the content of this Report. It has also been considered by the JCC, whose views will be reported to the Committee.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposals to extend the involvement of staff to planning and co-ordination activities will increase awareness of the implications of the Higher Still Development Programme and will assist the Council to make an informed contribution to the ongoing debate about the strategies and resources which will be required for the effective implementation of Higher Still.

JIM ANDERSON

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/NL/CJ