

## ANGUS COUNCIL

## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

25 APRIL 2000

## CONSULTATION EXERCISES

A - ASSESSMENT (3-14)

B - STRUCTURE AND BALANCE OF THE 5-14 CURRICULUM

## REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

**ABSTRACT**

This report provides details of two consultation exercises.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a notes the paper submitted in response to the consultative HMI paper on Assessment (3-14) (Appendix 1)
- b approves the draft response to the Scottish CCC's consultative guidelines on the Structure and Balance of the 5-14 Curriculum (Appendix 2)

**2 HMI REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT**

- 2.1 In November 1998, the then Scottish Office Education Minister, Helen Liddell MP, called for HMI to undertake a comprehensive review of Assessment for pre-fives and also for pupils in the 5-14 age range.
- 2.2 In December 1999 HMI published a consultation document as instructed by the Minister. The full consultation document, a summary, an associated parental leaflet and a list of questions (on which responses were sought by 31 March 2000) are all available for perusal in the Members' Lounge.
- 2.3 A short-life working group was formed in Angus to consider the HMI review. That group comprised representatives from almost all cluster groups as well as two nominees of the JCC (Teachers).
- 2.4 The enclosed response was derived from discussions within the working group. In order to comply with the timescale for response set by the Scottish Executive, Appendix 1 has been submitted as an officer response from Angus Council.

**3 SCOTTISH CCC DRAFT GUIDELINES ON THE STRUCTURE AND BALANCE OF THE 5-14 CURRICULUM**

- 3.1 In September/October 1999, the Scottish CCC undertook a preliminary consultation exercise on the desirability of updating guidelines on the Structure and Balance of the 5-14 Curriculum.

- 3.2 On the basis of the largely positive responses to that preliminary consultation, CCC has now produced a draft guideline for further consultation - a copy of which is available for perusal in the Members' Lounge.
- 3.3 The short-life working group described in paragraph 2.3 above devoted a proportion of its time to considering the aforementioned draft on the Structure and Balance of the Curriculum.
- 3.4 The attached draft response (Appendix 2) is now being submitted to the Education Committee for approval.

#### **4 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

Jim Anderson  
Director of Education

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.

#### **APPENDICES**

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## ANGUS COUNCIL

### RESPONSE TO HMI REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL AND 5-14

#### Introductory Comments

This Council welcomes the comprehensive and thought-provoking review which has been provided by HMI. The chapter outlining the purposes to which assessment can be put is especially helpful.

An attempt is made below to answer the questions framed as part of the consultation exercise, but perhaps it is equally important at the outset to note some general issues which consideration of this review has raised. These are:

- **Fitness for Purpose** - Any emerging proposals need to focus unequivocally on the purposes to which Assessment is to be put and need also to ensure that the proposed Assessment framework has the capacity to meet these purposes.
- **Usability** - Whatever formal arrangements are proposed for Assessment, the acid test will be whether or not these arrangements (and any reporting which flows from them) are perceived as useful by teachers, and also by parents. This perception is likely to be influenced by the degree to which any proposed arrangements lend themselves to ready and uncomplicated usage.
- **Manageability** - Similarly, any arrangements proposed must be manageable within the terms of likely available capacity within the system (including teacher time).
- **Evolution** - Given the plethora of new initiatives with which the Scottish education service is currently having to cope, fundamental changes to Assessment arrangements would be likely to pose genuine problems as well as having the capacity to further lower teacher morale. In any event, the national guidelines on Assessment (5-14) - published in October 1991 - remain highly relevant and enormously useful. It is therefore proposed that any changes which are necessary are based on a gradual, evolutionary approach which builds on current national 5-14 Assessment guidelines.

#### 1 Characteristics of an Effective Assessment System

- 1.1 The basic principles which underpin Assessment, and the broad kinds of purposes to which Assessment can be put, underpin the whole system. In addition, many of the practical issues which arise are similar for all stages of education. The starting point should be to create linkage principally by way of more effective curriculum planning (possibly incorporated within programmes of study); this in turn should assist teachers to become more aware of their pupils' previous learning and also of likely future learning, thereby helping to establish a more accurate perspective on the likely uses to which Assessment information may be put.

If high quality classroom experiences are taken to be the most critically important part of the process, with Assessment being seen as an integral part of learning and teaching, then the inescapable conclusion is that the professional judgements of teachers should be at the heart of any Assessment system.

- 1.2 Whilst there is some support for the concept of a broad framework set at national level, it is difficult to see how a national Assessment system which prescribes approaches in some detail can be of genuine assistance in improving the quality of the education service - leading as it inevitably would to a stifling of creativity and a potential narrowing of pupils' curricular experiences.

If it is decided that a broad national framework is to be developed, then it will be important to concentrate on basic principles - building ideally on existing national 5-14 Assessment guidelines.

- 1.3 If there is to be a broad framework for Assessment at a national level, then that framework must presumably follow on from national advice on the structure and balance of the curriculum (including all aspects of the curriculum).
- 1.4 Detailed arrangements should be left to education authorities who - it is assumed - are in a better position to be aware of agreed programmes of study on which detailed Assessment arrangements can be based. The education authority also is in a potentially more favourable position in terms of being able to prioritise resources if there is a need to do so. In this latter context, it is critically important to be able to provide sufficient quality time for teachers to evaluate assessment information and to discuss pupils' work - throughout the school year and not solely at the point of transfer from one stage to the next.
- 1.5 It seems self evident that different areas of learning will require to be assessed in quite different ways.
- 1.6 The need for effective ownership by all key stakeholders of any part of the educational process is paramount. Notwithstanding the attractiveness, therefore, of externally provided solutions, it seems that there is infinitely greater potential for quality improvement if these key stakeholders (principally teachers, pupils and parents) are empowered to devise their own detailed Assessment arrangements within broad parameters and underpinned by agreed programmes of study. So, for example, any assessment framework which is prepared at national level could more usefully be shared with schools on the basis of guidelines which can be adapted when appropriate (as opposed to a model which must be slavishly followed).

## **2 Possible ways the Assessment System could be made more Effective**

- 2.1 Continuing professional development is an absolute necessity for the teaching profession collectively and individually. The desirability of some staff development opportunities being linked to Assessment is endorsed wholeheartedly, although it will be important to ensure that the way in which these staff development opportunities are provided will reinforce the need for assessment to be seen as an integral part of the learning process. It is also relevant to point out that excellent staff development can take place by way of structured or semi-structured discussion among teachers. If schools/cluster groups/education authorities can find ways in which more opportunities can be created for such discussions - perhaps within a slightly more formally organised framework than is currently available - then that in itself would go a long way towards providing most teachers with opportunities to develop meaningfully in ways which genuinely support children's learning.
- 2.2 There are some concerns that excessively heavy advice documents may become counter-productive, although it is accepted that current ICT developments have the potential to revolutionise the ways in which teachers can access such advice. There is a desire among the teaching profession to see examples of assessed work, but that desire needs to be balanced against the potentially negative psychological impact of enormous volumes becoming seen as expected reading for all teachers. There is also a danger that, by placing undue emphasis on viewing examples of assessed work, a disproportionate priority is placed on the process of assessment as being equivalent to marking a product - whereas in reality assessment should be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process.
- 2.3 Similar comments to 2.2 above.
- 2.4 There is general support for the development of national advice on the types of assessment evidence which should be retained and the way in which that evidence should be recorded, reported and transferred. However, this support needs to be tempered in the light of some earlier comments, particularly the need for national advice to be essentially broad-brush, not over-prescriptive, and for unduly weighty advice documentation to be avoided. It seems likely that ICT developments will overtake some of this discussion in the relatively near future and that

the way in which some assessment evidence can be retained, recorded, reported and transferred may also become an issue in terms of use or otherwise of ICT.

- 2.5 There is considerable enthusiasm for an increase in informal moderation of Assessment. It is recognised that many schools currently adopt such an approach with varying degrees of formality, but it is also recognised that there is potential benefit in extending moderation possibly to all schools within a cluster group. Enthusiasm for the concept is constrained by practical implications including teachers' current conditions of service and the need to avoid disrupting the normal classroom process. Notwithstanding these practical reservations, HMI are encouraged to give serious consideration to developing some broad-brush advice on ways in which internal moderation could be more systematically adopted, and on ways in which sufficient resources can be made available to translate such systematic approaches into operational reality. Included within such advice might be reference to self assessment, peer assessment and the need to avoid excessive paperwork; also included might be illustrations of how to reach a consensus about "next steps" in learning.
- 2.6 There is little enthusiasm for the concept of external moderation, other than perhaps external moderation in the context of one teacher from one school in a given cluster group working occasionally alongside other teachers on the basis of a random sample from other schools within the same cluster group.
- 2.7 In considering any possible changes to National Tests as they are currently conceived, it is important to note that National Tests now appear to be very widely used indeed in primary schools, with growing use being reported in secondary schools. On the whole, there would appear to be less compatibility between the current National Testing regime and the well established culture of secondary schools than there is between that regime and the culture generally in Scottish primary schools. Although there is a natural reluctance to propose different arrangements for different sectors, the current inertia at national level which perpetuates two different cultures (a primary school culture and a secondary school culture) would appear to argue for a similar dichotomy to permeate educational assessment. In other words, the debate about the use of National Tests cannot be pursued in isolation from a wider debate about the way in which our education service is delivered - and in this context HMI may see merit in re-visiting some of the key ideas in the 10-14 report of 1986.

Less fundamentally - and more practically - it is relevant to note that there are continuing reservations about some aspects of National Tests, for example:

- the potential for narrowing the curriculum by only testing Reading, Writing and Mathematics
- the insufficient coverage which any individual National Test can achieve
- the belief held by a number of teachers (not least secondary teachers of English) that the National Tests in Writing are quite unreliable

Notwithstanding all the above reservations, there is a need for some system which can command the confidence of society as well as the key educational stakeholders, and which clearly enhances the pivotal place of professional judgement in the whole Assessment process. (It would also be an added bonus if the system of Assessment could offer genuine and demonstrable assistance in motivating pupils to realise their potential more fully). That there remains unease about existing National Tests is of some concern and must lead to either a complete abandoning of National Tests in their current form, or attempts to improve current arrangements. On balance at present there is thought to be merit in at least attempting to improve the current system.

- 2.8 Certain areas of the curriculum lend themselves more readily to testing as an appropriate part of Assessment than others. For primary teachers, certain parts of the curriculum also pose greater challenges than others and there may therefore be a greater willingness to seek confirmation of professional judgements (by way of National Tests) in these curricular areas than in others.

Science and Modern Languages spring to mind as possible areas of the curriculum which may lend themselves more readily to the use of National Tests than others by helping to boost teachers' confidence that their programmes of study are relevant and appropriate. However, it is important to recognise that many teachers may feel that any increase in the curricular areas subject to National Testing may result in unacceptable increases in workload.

The notion of building up a national bank of Assessment materials (based on existing National Tests) has some merit and may be worthy of further consideration.

- 2.9 Given the time and effort which has already gone into the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP), it seems only sensible that we try to cash in more effectively on that investment. One obvious immediate way forward would be to enable education authorities (or possibly individual cluster groups or individual schools) to buy into the programme in any given year. If this model were adopted, the payment of an agreed fee would mean that all pupils at certain stages in an education authority (or cluster group or school) could be expected to undertake the AAP Assessment at a given time, with the results of these Assessments being fed back by AAP to individual education authorities (or cluster groups or schools). One major advantage of this approach is that it begins to offer some assistance to government, to education authorities, to cluster groups and to schools in terms of addressing what the HMI Review describes as the second set of purposes of Assessment (ie providing information as a basis for monitoring and evaluating provision and attainment at school, education authority and national level). However, in order to achieve this purpose, there would be a need for AAP to tie in its procedures slightly more closely with existing 5-14 levels.
- 2.10 Whilst there is an acceptance that international comparisons can be helpful there is little enthusiasm at present for a huge investment of time and effort in becoming more proactive internationally in surveys.
- 2.11 Some fairly major reservations continue to be held about the use of externally set and marked tests, including:
- the inevitability of "Teaching to the Test" and consequent narrowing of the curriculum
  - the potential for creating undue stress among pupils, particularly younger pupils, if they were to be asked to sit such tests
  - the practical difficulties in using such tests to meet the first kind of purpose of Assessment meaningfully

Notwithstanding these reservations, the attraction of externally set and marked tests in terms of manageability and in terms of providing information as a basis for monitoring and evaluating provision is acknowledged. Once again, the primary/secondary divide comes into play, and externally set and marked tests are already very much part and parcel of the normal everyday life of a secondary school teacher; administering such tests to - say - all S2 pupils would be relatively straightforward, although it is by no means clear what purpose that would serve. In terms of a measure of value added, there may be an argument for externally set and marked tests being sat by all pupils at the end of P7, although the reservations listed above would all continue to have validity.

On balance, it would appear that the enormous cost of setting up a system of externally set and marked tests should be better dedicated to providing quality time to enable teachers to undertake more systematic moderation, which in itself should lead to more reliable assessments taking place, but reliable assessments which would fit both sets of assessment purposes.

- 2.12 In one sense, reporting on all pupils takes place annually towards the end of each school session and this in turn has led to a situation whereby many schools use National Tests principally in the latter half of the school year. Although there may be little to be gained by railing unnecessarily against this approach, it is important to recognise the conflict which has been engendered by different national initiatives which pull teachers in different directions - in this

case the Target Setting agenda encourages schools to test children as near to the end of session as possible, whereas National Testing is designed to be undertaken once the teacher is convinced the pupil has attained the appropriate level, whenever that may be.

In many ways, the response to this particular issue depends very heavily on the way in which other issues are taken forward - particularly the use of externally set and marked tests. It is, however, a crucial issue and one which highlights the potential for conflict between the two principal purposes of assessment which have been described by HMI.

### **3 Overall Package of Changes**

All of the above arguments tend to suggest that evolutionary change is more likely to be productive than fundamental change, and this is under-scored by an acknowledgement that there is a considerable body of anecdotal evidence at present within the Scottish education service of innovation fatigue. It seems self-evident that more meaningful change will take place if it is undertaken as a genuine collaborative effort between all key stakeholders, rather than being imposed by government on unwilling teachers, parents or pupils.

- 4** Perhaps it would be appropriate to re-visit the existing National Guidelines on Assessment (5-14) with a view to re-issuing them - updated to take account of changes which have occurred since 1991 - and also to take forward any specific additional amendments now being proposed. On the whole, it seems likely that the principal elements of the existing Guidelines can be endorsed, notwithstanding changing circumstances.
- 5** The main support needs highlighted by the above response relate to quality time being available for teaching staff to work with colleagues (and possibly also pupils and parents) in order to improve the reliability of their own individual and collective judgements.



JAA/CJ  
April 2000





ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

25 APRIL 2000

STRUCTURE AND BALANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

**1 GENERAL COMMENTS**

Overall the revised guidelines are reasonably clear and easy to read - if a little more lengthy than necessary.

The guidelines should be helpful to teachers planning the curriculum, but would be more manageable if some further editing could be undertaken to reduce them in length.

The guidelines offer appropriate flexibility.

The overall impression from those staff who have managed to find time to read the draft guidelines carefully is a favourable one. However, given the enormous range of weighty 5-14 documentation already being promoted there is a little disappointment that a more ruthless editing job had not been attempted on these guidelines - particularly since it had been hoped they would be intended principally to offer no more than a broad framework within which detailed curriculum planning by schools and education authorities could take place. Given the commitment contained within the guidelines to produce two companion publications - "Guide for Teachers and Managers" and "Staff Development Pack" much of the narrative in the guidelines could be significantly reduced.

**2 INTRODUCTION**

Interesting but unduly lengthy.

**3 RATIONALE**

This section should remain as an essential feature within the final guidelines, although there is an argument for combining it with Section 3 - "The Principles of 5-14." Some important messages are, however, repeated unnecessarily and the combined Sections 2 and 3 could perhaps be more appropriately reconfigured as:

- Aims of the 5-14 Curriculum (including the nurturing of an ethos of achievement)
- Nature of the 5-14 Curriculum (including reference to Dispositions, Core Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Essential Experiences)
- Learning Styles
- Underlying Principles of Breadth, Balance, Coherence, etc

A clear outline structure of the why, what and how of 5-14, set out using the above headings, would be slightly more helpful than the draft outline offered - which is thought to be a little lacking in structure.

#### 4 PRINCIPLES OF 5-14

Please see response to Section 3 (above), and note that it is believed to be worthwhile to repeat these key principles within this core document.

#### 5 DEVELOPING THE PRINCIPLES OF 5-14

- a Breadth - This section is mercifully brief and to the point. If it is possible to reduce the list of cross-curricular aspects (eg by assuming that Health Promotion, Sustainable Development and Media Education are already incorporated within one or more of the five main curriculum areas), that would be helpful. Also helpful would be a statement confirming the daunting task facing the Scottish education service in being expected to accommodate ever more content into what many already regard as an over-crowded curriculum.
- b Balance - This section covers a lot, most of which is essential. There may be merit in stressing that the time allocations offer a broad framework principally for planning purposes (already touched on in paragraph 4.9). It will be vital to cross-refer this document to the revised 5-14 guidelines soon to be issued as final updates, particularly that on Environmental Studies, in order to be absolutely certain that the content proposed can be reasonably addressed within 15% of a primary school pupil's time. Some doubts are being expressed on this very specific point.
- c Continuity - A very interesting and stimulating section, notwithstanding earlier comments about the excessive length of the document as a whole. On balance, however, paragraph 4.18 could probably be omitted from the final guidelines. The final bullet point of 4.16, "professional partnerships" should be placed after the third bullet point, in order to emphasise the connections between the two.
- d Coherence - This section is also interesting and has the merit of being presented on one single side of A4 - ideal as a starter paper to stimulate further discussion.
- e Progression - This section is fully supported.

#### 6 STAFF DEVELOPMENT AWARENESS RAISING PACK

The concept of developing such a pack is fully supported.

#### 7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

All in all, the draft guidelines are well written and represent a comprehensive examination of all the key issues.

To have maximum impact, some editing would be useful - in order to highlight the key messages for teachers who continue to feel overwhelmed by an enormous volume of weighty 5-14 documentation.

There are some references to pedagogy within the draft guidelines. Given the nature of the subject it is unsurprising that these references are a little thin on the ground. However, one of the principal criticisms of the 5-14 programme has been that it has concentrated unduly on the "what" of the curriculum and insufficiently on "how" children learn and how teachers teach. Every opportunity to highlight the pivotal importance of classroom interaction should therefore be taken, and if this point can be borne in mind as the final version of the document is drafted, significant benefits could accrue.