



# **Evaluation of the Implementation of the Revised Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Northern Ireland...**

## **from planning to preparation**

**Dick Downing  
Kerry Martin  
Dr Sarah Allen**

**August 2007**



Queen's University  
Belfast

*An innovative partnership – a centre of excellence in Northern Ireland*



National Foundation  
for Educational Research

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Contents</b>  | <b>i</b>  |
| <b>Executive summary</b>   | <b>i</b>  |
| Introduction   | i         |
| Main findings and issues   | i         |
| Further research   | iii       |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Structure of the report  | 1         |
| 1.2 Changes in the sample  | 3         |
| <b>2 Context</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| 2.1 Political developments and transfer tests  | 4         |
| 2.2 Decision making  | 5         |
| 2.3 Responses to the concerns of principals  | 5         |
| 2.4 The involvement of principals in the central management of the implementation      | 6         |
| 2.5 The review of public administration  | 7         |
| 2.6 Higher education   | 7         |
| <b>3. Preparation, training and support</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| 3.1 Training and support received  | 9         |
| 3.2 Attitudes to support received  | 11        |
| 3.3 Evaluation findings from the training providers                                    | 13        |
| 3.4 Logistical issues  | 15        |
| 3.5 Partnerships with other schools  | 15        |
| 3.6 Training for substitute teachers   | 16        |
| 3.7 Cross Curricular issues  | 16        |
| 3.8 Key points   | 17        |
| <b>4 Changes during the year of preparation</b>  | <b>18</b> |
| 4.1 Successes experienced  | 18        |
| 4.2 Teachers ratings of aspects of the revised curriculum                              | 19        |
| 4.3 The extent to which teachers felt informed about aspects of the revised curriculum | 21        |

|          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 4.4      | The extent of teachers' confidence in taking on responsibility for aspects of the curriculum | 23        |
| 4.5      | Attitudes to the revised curriculum  | 26        |
| 4.6      | Key points   | 30        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Prognosis for future implementation</b>   | <b>31</b> |
| 5.1      | Changes in perceptions of school preparedness  | 31        |
| 5.2      | Planned implementation for the coming year   | 32        |
| 5.3      | Outstanding barriers and additional support  | 34        |
| 5.4      | Key points   | 37        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Progress since the first report</b>   | <b>38</b> |
| 6.1      | Areas of progress  | 38        |
| 6.2      | Key points   | 45        |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Summary of the key issues</b>   | <b>46</b> |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Recommendations for further evaluation</b>  | <b>50</b> |
| 8.1      | Potential evaluation approaches for the future   | 50        |
|          | <b>Appendix 1</b>  | <b>52</b> |
|          | <b>References</b>  | <b>55</b> |

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report completes the current phase of the research programme by NFER at Queens on behalf of the Partnership Management Board (PMB). It reports on progress in the implementation process since the first interim report in May 2006 and the school and teacher baseline report in January 2007.

The first report explored the planning that was taking place at that time, and was based on interviews with members of the PMB and staff from the agencies involved, as well as focus groups with teachers and principals.. The second report explored the attitudes and perspectives of teachers and principals in 25 schools about to set out on the year of preparation for the revised curriculum in years one and five, and in key stage 3. The final report sets out this sample's current readiness to commence implementation in 2007/8, and reviews progress over full the period of the evaluation. It is based on re-interviewing most of the teachers and principals that had previously been interviewed at the start of the academic year. Interviews were also conducted with the co-chairs of both PMB and the principals' forum. Reference is made to the evaluation materials provided by support delivery agencies (CCEA, ELBs and RTU) and the GTCNI. Progress over the last two years is depicted by updating the Logic Model diagram presented in the May 2007 report.

## Main findings and issues

### Findings

- A large majority of the teacher sample was embracing the revised curriculum enthusiastically.
- On the whole, the training provided for teachers was well received.
- The training support has resulted in a substantial increase in the extent to which teachers feel informed about the revised curriculum.
- The Curriculum Box was very well received by teachers, although its late delivery has provided cause for concern.
- A noted impact in some schools has been an increase in team working and educational debate amongst the staff.

- A substantial majority of teachers were planning to implement a significant proportion of the revised curriculum during the coming year.
- Of the different elements of the revised curriculum, ‘developing the young person as a contributor to the economy and the environment’ is the one that provides the greatest challenge for teachers. Indicating uncertainty about contents and lack of confidence to implement
- Although the InCAS training was well received, there remains concern about putting the training into practice, and about the logistics of doing so. Shortage of teacher time and computer availability are seen as potential hazards.
- The majority of teachers are concerned about the time available to them to prepare lesson plans etc to meet the new requirements. Many principals remain concerned about the overall timetable for implementation, especially that 2007/8 remains the first year of implementation.
- The shortage of substitute teachers, especially when teachers from several schools in one area need substitutes, is seen as very challenging in some schools.
- Concern was expressed that initial teacher education still needed to move further in developing its courses to meet the needs of the revised curriculum.

### Issues for consideration

- Uncertainty about the fate of transfer tests has a serious potential to cause delay in the wholehearted implementation of the revised curriculum. Decision makers should be aware that many principals and teachers see the issues of implementation of the revised curriculum and the transfer tests as inextricable. It is widely perceived that the revised curriculum is incompatible with preparing pupils for academic transfer tests, and while the uncertainty remains, some schools may hold back from wholehearted implementation.
- Individual schools and teachers are inevitably at different stages of readiness to implement the revised curriculum. While some are happy with the permission to create their own curricula, others seek more prescription and guidance. Attention should be given to addressing their different needs. The revised curriculum requires teachers to interpret the curriculum to their own circumstances and their pupils’ needs. Some may need more support in moving towards such a position.
- Given the opportunity to gradually implement the revised curriculum, it may be appropriate to monitor the different ways in which this is interpreted and carried out, and the rate of movement towards full implementation in 2010. In particular, it may be necessary to target support more specifically to schools that have the greatest distance to travel.
- Although there have been delays in some aspects of the implementation support programme, there is ample evidence to suggest that the

implementation process is on course in most schools. However, teachers will need time to develop the new practice that is needed if the revised curriculum is to achieve all that is intended.

- Research indicates that effective and sustained embedding of curriculum change requires a whole school approach and sustained support. Principals may need to be drawn more directly into the training process and teachers may need continuing on the job support in their classroom practice.

## Further research

For years one and five, and key stage three, the process now moves from preparation to implementation in the classroom. The preparation stage will progressively be started with the remaining year groups up to the year 2009. All schools will be expected to be teaching to the revised curriculum by 2010.

PMB may deem it appropriate to commission further research as this process unfolds. The following possible approaches are tentatively suggested as worthy of consideration.

- A further round of data collection with the existing sample of teachers and principals to track their progress from preparation to implementation. This would enable further updating of the Logic Model, incorporating actual outcomes in the form of teaching and whole-school practices. This could again be accompanied by the perspectives of PMB members concerning progress in the implementation process.
- From this could be drawn a small number of school best practice case studies in a range of types of schools. These could depict successful implementation in greater detail, through interviews with managers, teachers, pupils and parents, and through observations. This would effectively reflect the holistic nature of the revised curriculum itself, by exploring the extent to which features such as connected learning and the development of thinking skills are being addressed school-wide. Such case studies could inform other schools about the changes that are made in the curriculum and pedagogy, and how those changes were achieved.
- A new survey of pupils' perceptions of the revised curriculum, which might usefully make comparisons with the findings of the NFER curriculum cohort study that was completed in 2005. By using and updating the research instruments used previously, it would be possible to map the extent of changes as seen from the perspective of pupils.
- A survey of teacher perceptions of teaching to the revised curriculum, which itself could provide a valuable comparison with the pupils' perceptions study.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Structure of the report

This is the final report under the current contract for the evaluation of the implementation of the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements in Northern Ireland. The first report, in May 2006 explored the planning work being undertaken by PMB in preparation for supporting schools, and looked at the context in which this preparation was taking place. It also explored, through a series of focus groups, the anticipation and apprehension of school principals and teachers.

Progress and developments since that time will be explored in section 6 of this report.

An interim report, presented in January 2007, explored the understanding, attitudes and readiness of teachers in a sample of 25 schools at the start of the year of school preparation. The present report is based on interviews that sought to update our understanding of their readiness to start to implement the revised curriculum in 2007/8. In doing so it explores their reception to the support provided for that preparation, and their intentions concerning the steps to be taken in 2007/8 to introduce the revised curriculum in years 1 and 5, and key stage three.

The structure of this report is as follows:

Chapter 2 explores the current context within which the implementation is taking place, and the ways in which that context may be affecting the implementation process. It therefore addresses the political context and decision making, and changes in the structures that have been developed to support the process of implementation.

Chapter 3 examines the training made available to teachers during the last year, and the reception that this has received from teachers. It looks at the logistical issues faced by schools in their preparations, and the extent to which they have worked together with other schools. It sets out the extent to which schools have addressed the needs of substitute teachers with whom they work,

and at any particular issues faced in post-primary schools in relation to cross-curricular working.

Chapter 4 identifies changes that have occurred during the year of preparation to teachers' confidence to implement the revised curriculum; to the extent to which they are better informed about it; changes in their attitudes towards the revised curriculum; any changes that have already become apparent in their classroom practice; and any successes that have been experienced in the preparation year.

Chapter 5 sets out how teachers and principals see the coming year of starting the implementation process in classrooms. It examines perceptions of the preparedness of schools and the implementation plans in schools for the coming year. It also sets out the remaining perceived barriers to implementation,

Chapter 6, as mentioned above, looks at the extent to which progress has taken place since this evaluation began, by updating the Logic model, thus depicting the progress that has been made over the last 18 months.

Chapter 7 summarises the key issues that have emerged through the evaluation to date.

Chapter 8 suggests further evaluation that might support the continuing implementation process as it rolls out to other year groups.

Finally, Appendix 1 sets the implementation process in the wider research context by referring to Michael Fullan's analysis in 'The New Meaning of Educational Change'.

Reference will be made in this report to other evaluative materials generated by PMB partners, including the GTCNI Survey of Teachers 2006, ELB evaluations of training events, the CCEA interim evaluation of the InCAS interpretation of data seminar and the RTU evaluation of their training for leaders.

## 1.2 Changes in the sample

Data collection at the start of the academic year 2006/7 involved a total of 100 teachers and principals in a total of 25 schools, 15 of which were primaries and 10 post primary. Return visits late in the Summer Term 2007 were made to all of the schools that participated in the first round. However, there was some attrition (11 per cent), caused by staff moves, absences, or unavoidable unavailability. Therefore there were interviews with a total of 66 teachers, of which 28 teachers were from key stage 3, 16 teachers from Primary 1 and 20 teachers from Primary 5. It was deemed inappropriate to substitute those individuals since the clear intent was to identify the extent of change in the experience and perceptions of individuals. This attrition was more prevalent in post-primary schools. Two of the 25 principals originally interviewed were unavailable for interview.

In addition to the above, interviews were conducted with the co-chairs of both the Partnership Management Board and of the newly-formed Principals' Forum, in order to gain an overview of the situation as it now stands.

## 2 Context

This section of the report seeks to set out some of the key contextual issues (i.e. issues beyond the school environment) that are currently deemed to be affecting the process of implementing the revised curriculum. Some of these have been apparent throughout the inception of this evaluation in Autumn 2006. The following contextual issues will be discussed:

- political developments and transfer tests
- decision making
- responses to the concerns of principals
- the involvement of principals in the central management of the implementation
- the review of public administration
- higher education/ initial teacher training.

### 2.1 Political developments and transfer tests

The entire implementation planning process has taken place in the context of awaiting final decisions from political parties on power sharing. Although the decision to implement the revised curriculum had already been taken, along with decisions concerning funding to support the process, the ending of transfer tests was less clear cut. The political parties were explicitly given the opportunity to make the final decision concerning the abolition or retention of transfer tests if they agreed to power sharing by May 2007. Although power sharing has now been achieved, there would appear to be little evidence that a decision concerning the transfer tests is any closer. Several interviewees identified this as a significant contextual issue for the implementation of the revised curriculum. They suggested that while there was the possibility of academic transfer tests remaining, some primary schools would be reluctant to make rapid progress in implementing the revised curriculum, since they believed that it would not support them in preparing pupils for the test.

*So we are still going to be preparing for the traditional transfer but they'll be wanting us to take on board the revised curriculum at the same time. It doesn't work, you can't do it, the two things don't sit together, you know. The revised curriculum isn't compatible with academic selection.*

## Primary principal

This view was expressed by only a quarter of primary principals, and was volunteered by interviewees as part of ‘any other comments’. It was also reported that a group of up to 30 grammar school principals were putting forward the possibility of preparing their own academic transfer tests. If this were to happen, one must assume that it would be likely to influence the approach of feeder primary schools seeking to progress their pupils to grammar schools. For some primary schools at least, these are significant factor affecting their attitude to the implementation of the revised curriculum.

## 2.2 Decision making

During the earlier part of the planning process, considerable frustration was expressed concerning the apparent slowness on the part of the Department of Education in making decisions about the curriculum or related issues such as funding. This particular frustration would appear to have receded as the proposed changes have become enshrined in law, although concern still exists that the decisions made in some cases fell short of what was hoped for, especially concerning funding and the timetable for the process.

## 2.3 Responses to the concerns of principals

In recognition of the considerable concerns being expressed by primary principals, both as individuals and collectively, the Department convened a conference for all primary principals in May 2007. The Conference addressed the strategic issues facing primary education and the continuing support arrangements that would be available to them in implementing the revised curriculum from September 2007. The new minister specifically referred to the transitional nature of the first year of implementation (2007/8), the need to secure adequate teacher release time and the need for sufficient resources. The transitional nature of 2007/8 was subsequently reiterated in a letter to principals from Will Haire of the Department.

*The department does not expect all schools in this transition year, however, to have all the elements in place nor to have their planning for each stage fully completed.*

Letter from DENI to primary principals

Data from interviews with the evaluation sample would suggest that schools are enthusiastic about the revised curriculum and, by and large, proceeding with the implementation for the coming year, albeit to differing extents (see Section 5). Schools will be expected to identify their own development pace, but with all completing the process by 2010. Despite this, the reassurance proffered the Department concerning the transitional nature of 2007/8, has not entirely satisfied all principals. It was reported that many primary principals did not see this as going far enough, it being claimed that schools unable to make much headway in the first year may be stigmatised and compared unfavourably with others. Several refer to the late arrival of the 'Curriculum Box', in May 2007, suggesting that this, and the late start to training for teachers, would justify delaying the start of implementation until 2008/9.

*Most principals are asking for a planning year starting in September. The minister has said it can be called a transition year, and schools who are ready to start can start. Principals say that is not enough. We want a full year when we can sit down and go through the [curriculum] boxes with quality time to plan a way forward.*

Primary principal

Schools would now appear to have discretion concerning the amount of implementation that they undertake during the coming year. But there would appear to be little definition about what would constitute a sufficient amount of progress, which may itself lead to some confusion in the future.

*It needs to be delayed; saying a transition year to me - we need to know what a transition year is. Do we do InCAS? Do we do a pupil profile? What is statutory? What isn't? We need things cleared up and we're not getting a lot of information and principals should have been told.*

Primary principal

There may be a danger that some schools will gradually be left behind in the implementation process and there may be the need to additionally support such schools if this were to occur.

## **2.4 The involvement of principals in the central management of the implementation**

Concern had been expressed for some time about the absence of representation of principals or teachers on PMB. Throughout the planning period (i.e. prior to

the direct involvement of schools in preparing for implementation), it was deemed more appropriate and practicable for the partnership to comprise the agencies managing the process. During 2006/7 it was decided to broaden the constituency of the Board, with representatives including bodies such as the GTCNI, the teaching unions and principals from both primary and post-primary schools.

A principals' forum was also established to provide a conduit for the views of principals to the PMB and that forum provides the two principals' representatives on PMB (one primary and one post primary). The forum had met three times at the time of this report and most of its attention had been devoted to problems being experienced in the primary sector. There would appear to be widespread acknowledgement within the forum that issues of resourcing and staffing at primary level are in the greater need of attention. It is too early to ascertain evidence of impact of this forum.

PMB is perceived to have been a significant and positive player in a very difficult process and to offer a model of partnership working which may bode well for the future. Increasing its constituency may have contributed to the improved image, which had previously been marred in the eyes of many principals by the absence of current school practitioners.

## **2.5 The review of public administration**

At earlier stages of this research the process of reorganising public administration had been deemed to be a factor with the potential to negatively affect the implementation process. That process has now been put on hold. Recent interviews have not revealed continuing concern about this issue.

## **2.6 Higher education**

Although not an issue about which questions were asked directly of teachers or principals as part of the evaluation, concern was expressed that the teacher training institutions may not themselves be sufficiently prepared to enable their students to teach the revised curriculum. It was claimed that this was an issue discussed informally amongst principals. At earlier stages of the evaluation there had been concern that the HEIs had not been sufficiently integrated into the implementation management process. This has now

changed, but this phase of evaluation has not tracked the progress of the HEIs in adapting their courses to the revised curriculum.

## 3. Preparation, training and support

This chapter reviews the preparation undertaken by schools over the past year in preparing for implementation. It covers:

- training and support received
- attitudes to the support received
- a summary of evaluations undertaken by support providers
- logistical issues faced by schools in their preparations
- the extent to which schools have collaborated
- training for substitute teachers and
- issues faced in post-primary schools in relation to cross-curricular working.

### 3.1 Training and support received

All teachers were asked to summarise the training they had received during the course of the academic year.

#### Primary teachers

Primary school teachers had received three days training focussing on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding; Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and Assessment for Learning. These training days were delivered by CASS officers from the Education and Library Boards. The P5 teachers attended an additional one day training course on InCAS and the pupil profile which was delivered by CCEA.

Each training day involved several schools from the local area, usually at an off-school site. This provided an opportunity for teachers to network with each other, enabling them to share their thoughts and exchange ideas on the process and practicalities of the implementation. This was perceived as a very positive element of the training although some teachers commented that they would have liked more time for such 'networking' activity. There did not appear to be a specific time set aside for this during the training. Additionally, the

primary school teachers in one of the ELBs reported attending cluster meetings that were organised by their board.

Most primary teachers only reported the training that had been organised by the ELB staff. Few (five teachers) referred to in-school activity such as watching the Big Picture DVD, workshops, online support and attending weekly school meetings. However, this may also have been experienced by other teachers who had not chosen to report it.

### Post-primary teachers

By contrast, the training reportedly received by post-primary teachers was much more variation between schools and in some cases even within schools.

Training for post-primary teachers comprised a combination of internal days that were led by senior management teams and curriculum leaders, and training days that were led by CASS officers from the ELBs. Some training comprised a general overview of the Revised Curriculum and other training was more subject-specific. In contrast to primary schools, post-primaries undertook training organised within their own school as well events as in conjunction with other schools. Teachers with curriculum leadership responsibilities reported having received additional training that was delivered by the Education and Library Boards.

Overall the primary and post-primary teachers received, on average, similar numbers of training days (i.e. four days). The primary teacher training seemed to be far more uniform across teachers and schools in terms of content and quantity. The post-primary teacher training, however, appeared to be much more tailored to the school and varied in terms of how it was delivered, what was covered and the number of training days individual staff had access to.

This may be due, in part, to the greater flexibility in staffing and resourcing in post-primary schools and the opportunities afforded by scale – post-primary teachers have access to a much larger community of colleagues, whereas primary teachers seem to particularly value the opportunity to meet with colleagues from other schools. **It may be appropriate to exploit this possibility to a greater extent by scheduling in more networking opportunities in primary training events.**

### 3.2 Attitudes to support received

There were a range of attitudes expressed by teachers towards the training they received over the last academic year.

According to interviewees, the most effective training was delivered by trainers who were experienced and knowledgeable about the revised curriculum and who had relevant classroom experience. The teachers attending training days led by such people were extremely positive and reported feeling very supported.

*For every course they were really well prepared, the people who were taking it were very enthusiastic and always willing to answer your questions, making you feel very comfortable about it because there was a lot of schools there where they had no idea and it was a completely new thing to them.*

Primary 5 teacher

By the same token, however, it was obvious to teachers when trainers were not adequately trained themselves.

*The thinking skills day was very good but at some of the training, particularly the first one on personal development, some of the people who were leading from the top didn't know themselves about things when we asked them questions about what stays in, in terms of content and what comes out. In the first session it was like the trainers had just been given the information and they had to deliver.*

Primary 5 teacher

This resulted in a negative training experience for about one fifth of teachers as the trainers were unable to effectively deliver the training, answer teachers' questions or give them the reassurance that they needed.

#### Primary teachers

Teachers were eager for less theory and much more practically based information and direction. Approximately a quarter of the teachers specifically mentioned and praised the pack that was received for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, as it contained many practical ideas to get teachers started.

As reported above, primary teachers also greatly valued the opportunity to get together with other teachers and were very keen on further cluster groups.

*I think I said that last time actually as well, that you feel if there was a cluster of people that you would feel less isolated.*

Primary 5 teacher

They were particularly keen to have contact with other teachers who were involved in the pilot programme so that they could disseminate good practice.

### Post-primary teachers

Overwhelmingly, the post-primary teachers responded extremely positively to workshops that were held with colleagues in-school and these sessions were regarded by most as a successful and highly effective endeavour. Some comments included:

*Very good – felt much better informed as a result.*

*Very useful because of all the different approaches to active learning, it was specific to our school and pupils and it involved a lot of staff sharing with each other.*

In contrast to primary teachers, post-primary teacher preferred training within their own school and with their own colleagues.

### Principals

Principals were asked what type of support they found most appropriate to the needs of their staff. Their responses were very mixed, highlighting the different developmental stages at which schools currently find themselves. Examples of training that primary principals found the most effective included:

- evidence of good practice and a more practical training style
- in-school training that everyone can attend.

Post-primary principals highlighted the following types of training as the most effective:

- training with other schools

- good exemplar materials.

It is notable that while primary teachers sought more networking with other schools, primary principals regarded more in-school activity as the key. Conversely, post-primary teachers tended to value their in-school events, while many post-primary principals were looking to more training with other schools. While in-school activity will always be managed by the schools themselves, there may be the need in the future to support inter-school training activities.

### **3.3 Evaluation findings from the training providers**

NFER was asked to consider evaluation reports generated by the agencies that have been charged with providing the support for schools in preparing to implement the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements. The following paragraphs summarise their findings.

#### **Evaluation of InCAS Data Seminar by CCEA**

CCEA conducted an evaluation of the day-long seminar introducing teachers to the Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS), focussing particularly in the interpretation of data.

The evaluation forms completed by participating teachers gave high scores for all of the inputs provided by CCEA and its trainer (including the explanation of aims, organisation and administration, the trainer approach, format of the event etc). The scoring for outcomes (such as confidence to interpret InCAS data and confidence to report assessment feedback data to parents) were relatively lower. This further reinforces the findings of the NFER evaluation that teachers will need time to absorb the new information and to put the techniques into practice. However, they may also need on going support to progress this. It is understood that a further training session will be taking place using ‘real’ data provided by teachers themselves.

#### **Evaluation of ELB revised curriculum training by the ELBs.**

The ELBs conducted a collective analysis of the training that they had provided to schools, using questionnaires completed by participating teachers. Again, the scoring for training inputs (organisation, materials etc) were high,

with very slightly lower average scores for the learning outcomes. Differences in scores between the learning outcomes were very marginal. No commentary was provided to illuminate the average questionnaire scores. However the results appear to be compatible with the findings of this research concerning improvements in teacher knowledge of the revised curriculum.

### **Evaluation of the Leading Learning Conference for primary principals by RTU.**

The regional training unit evaluated its Implementing Assessment Change training event for primary heads, using data derived from participant questionnaires. Again, a high average satisfaction score for all aspects (organisation and materials, venue quality and learning outcomes) was reported, based on a ten per cent random sample of the completed questionnaires. Only a brief commentary on these results was provided.

The above evaluations would suggest a high level of satisfaction with the training events themselves, but give little indication of the likely impact on implementation in schools to be derived from participating in those events. That will be dependent upon a much wider range of factors.

### **GTCNI Survey of Teachers 2006**

NFER researchers also considered the GTCNI Survey of Teachers 2006 findings as reported in January 2007. The survey reported that the highest priority for CPD in the next two years was preparation for the revised curriculum. However, it was notable that less than half of those surveyed deemed the revised curriculum as most likely to improve the quality of education in Northern Ireland, well behind (in order of frequency of citation) the literacy and numeracy strategies, the ICT strategy and assessment for learning.

It may be interesting to investigate any changes in these ratings over the coming years to see if experience with the revised curriculum alters perceptions of its value.

### 3.4 Logistical issues

Principals were asked what they considered to be the key logistical issues they had to face over the last year in preparation for the implementation of the revised curriculum. The main issues raised concerned the difficulties in providing substitute cover and the different levels of training received by different teachers.

One third of principals mentioned the difficulties they encountered in trying to organise relief cover on the days that their teachers were out on training. Several principals perceived this to be due to the lack of availability of substitute teachers as so many other schools required the same relief teachers to cover the same training days. Indeed, one principal highlighted the fact that some substitute teachers were also attending these one day courses, which only added to their lack of availability. Two principals mentioned that the associated costs of relief cover was an issue for them and another principal mentioned the additional time that he had to put aside in order to prepare for the substitute teacher's cover. A quarter of principals additionally raised concern about the disruption and lack of continuity for pupils that is associated with having substitute teachers.

A quarter of all principals mentioned difficulties associated with the different level of training received by different members of staff within a school. Two primary principals felt that they themselves were being left behind as they were not receiving the same training as their teachers, upsetting their normally collegiate approach to development it maybe that more training for principals themselves in the revised curriculum would be appropriate. In the post-primary schools the curriculum leaders received more training than other teachers. However, half of the post-primary principals stated that finding the time for knowledge transfer, from the curriculum leaders to the remaining staff, was a problem and as a result the information was not yet being disseminated thoroughly.

### 3.5 Partnerships with other schools

Principals were asked whether they had undertaken any training with other schools. The majority of primary schools had not, up to this time, been collaborating with other schools, other than through participating in shared training days. For the minority that had worked with other schools, half of the

collaborations were on an informal basis that had been arranged between principals.

For example, the principal in a school that had taken part in the pilot programme had worked closely with other principals in the area. He had shared with them successful outside training that his school had received and had encouraged teachers from other schools to visit and observe some of their teaching practice, particularly in relation to the enriched curriculum.

The majority of post-primary schools also reported that they had not been collaborating with other schools in relation to the revised curriculum. However one post-primary pilot school was successfully continuing their collaboration with other schools that had been established as part of the pilot.

### **3.6 Training for substitute teachers**

Approximately half of all principals were making training opportunities available to their substitute teachers, or more specifically those teachers who were providing relief cover on a long term basis. Some of the reasons cited for not making the opportunities more widely available were that principals did not have sufficient time or resources to send their own teachers on the training, let alone the substitute teachers as well, or that it simply was not a priority for them. Since data collection for this report, training in the revised curriculum had taken place specifically for substitute teachers. Further training events had also been arranged for substitute teachers in the autumn term (2007).

### **3.7 Cross Curricular issues**

Post-primary teachers were asked about the extent to which they had been able to address cross curricular issues with other teachers. It emerged that:

- Approximately one third of teachers had actively begun to address cross curricular issues and some mentioned the usefulness of the curriculum mapping exercise in doing so.
- Another third of teachers were in the preparation phase and had either started making informal links or were looking to see where links could be made.

- The remaining third had not yet started to address these issues and lack of time was cited as a reason for this by a small number of teachers.

### 3.8 Key points

- Training was deemed most effective when delivered by well trained, experienced and knowledgeable trainers.
- Primary teachers responded well to cluster groups and contact with teachers from other schools.
- Post-primary teachers reported within-school training to be the most effective and valuable type of training.
- Teachers wanted more dissemination of good practice and more practical training.
- For some post-primary schools more time was needed for dissemination of the training received.

## 4 Changes during the year of preparation

This section of the report identifies changes that have occurred during the year of preparation including:

- the successes experienced;
- the extent to which teachers are better informed about the revised curriculum;
- teachers' confidence in taking on responsibility for aspects of the revised curriculum; and
- changes in teacher attitudes to the curriculum overall.

### 4.1 Successes experienced

Principals were asked what they considered to be the greatest successes in preparing for the introduction of the revised curriculum in September 2007. Four main types of success were identified namely:

- changes in teachers' approach to learning
- enthusiasm and commitment of their staff
- changes in practice
- a sense of survival.

A third of principals commented on the **change in teachers' approach to learning** as they have started to understand the new methodologies of the revised curriculum and embrace the new pedagogy.

*...[There is a] heightened awareness of how we teach, what we teach and why we are teaching it.*

Primary principal

There was greater discussion on learning and teaching which had '*...forced reflection*'. In addition, teachers' own professional development had benefited and their confidence had grown as they had taken ownership of it through disseminating to colleagues and taking on leadership roles. As one post-primary principal commented:

*Teachers took ownership of it probably more effectively and more positively than I would have believed possible one year ago.*

Post-primary principal

About a quarter of the principals specifically raised the point that they considered the enthusiasm and commitment of their staff to be a great success over the past year and reported a greater sense of collective responsibility and teamwork among their teachers.

*The enthusiasm of the staff to make change to the curriculum would be the greatest success. I can't really say any more than that apart from the amount of work that they have done themselves. Just the very openness of the staff to take the ideas of the new curriculum and the kind of core thinking behind it on board, and to try and reorganise their teaching and learning to fit in with that. That's it really.*

Primary principal

A quarter of principals referred to the **changes in practice** that were taking place in their schools in relation to the increased use and understanding of assessment for learning, questioning and creating opportunities for young people to participate in their learning. Teachers were also being challenged about what they had done in the past and whether this had really been successful. Many were working to increase parents' awareness of what they can expect from the revised curriculum.

And finally, there was a sense of **survival** in that teachers were not despairing as a result of the training. For example, as one post-primary principal commented, learning for life and work was introduced '*without any grief or weeping and wailing*'.

## 4.2 Teachers ratings of aspects of the revised curriculum

The study asked primary and post-primary teachers in each of the 25 schools to consider the following nine aspects of the revised curriculum as labelled in the 'Big Picture':

- the curriculum objectives in general
- the curriculum objective – to develop the young person as an individual
- the curriculum objective – to develop the young person as contributor to society
- the curriculum objective – to develop the young person as contributor to economy and environment
- developing thinking skills and personal capabilities in pupils
- making connections across the learning areas
- developing attitudes and dispositions in pupils
- incorporating assessment for learning

- promoting and encouraging new learning experiences.

In the first round of data collection in September/October 2006 teachers rated **how well informed** they were about the above aspects of the revised curriculum on a five-point scale (1 = not informed; 5 = very informed). Teachers also rated **how confident** they were about taking responsibly for each of the aspects (1 = not confident; 5 = very confident). This scoring was repeated in the second phase of data collection in May/June 2007. Table 1 shows the average ratings scores teachers gave for each aspect in phase 1 and 2 of the research.

**Table 1** Average teacher ratings scores

| Aspects of the revised curriculum |  | Phase of research | Average teacher ratings scores |              |            |              |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                                   |  |                   | Informed about                 |              | Confidence |              |
|                                   |  |                   | Primary                        | Post Primary | Primary    | Post Primary |
| Curriculum Objectives             | Curriculum objectives in general                                   | Phase 1           | 2.5                            | 3.6          | 3.1        | 3.2          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.6                            | 4.1          | 3.5        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Develop the young person as an individual                          | Phase 1           | 2.8                            | 3.4          | 3.4        | 3.8          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.9                            | 4.1          | 3.8        | 4.1          |
|                                   | Develop the young person as contributor to society                 | Phase 1           | 2.7                            | 3.5          | 3.1        | 3.7          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.6                            | 4.0          | 3.6        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Develop the young person as contributor to economy and environment | Phase 1           | 2.6                            | 3.5          | 2.9        | 3.6          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.7                            | 3.7          | 3.3        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Develop thinking skills and personal capabilities in pupils        | Phase 1           | 3.2                            | 3.7          | 3.6        | 3.9          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 4.0                            | 4.0          | 3.8        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Make connections across the learning areas                         | Phase 1           | 3.1                            | 3.7          | 3.7        | 3.7          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.7                            | 4.0          | 3.7        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Develop attitudes and dispositions in pupils                       | Phase 1           | 3.1                            | 3.8          | 3.6        | 3.9          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.8                            | 3.9          | 3.7        | 4.0          |
|                                   | Incorporate assessment for learning                                | Phase 1           | 2.9                            | 3.4          | 3.1        | 3.7          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 3.7                            | 3.8          | 3.4        | 3.9          |
|                                   | Promote and encourage new learning experiences                     | Phase 1           | 3.1                            | 3.8          | 3.4        | 3.9          |
|                                   |  | Phase 2           | 4.0                            | 4.1          | 3.9        | 4.2          |

*N=64 (average ratings scores given)*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rating scale: 1 = not informed; 5 = very informed, 1 = do not deliver any of the aspects; 5 = deliver all of the aspects, 1 = not confident; 5 = very confident.

### 4.3 The extent to which teachers felt informed about aspects of the revised curriculum

Overall there was an average increase of one whole point between primary teacher's average scores for how informed they felt about the revised curriculum since phase one of the research. The increase in score was less so for post-primary teachers with an average increase in score of 0.4. Ratings given by teachers in phase 2 of the research (following training) showed that overall around half of the teachers felt more informed about the revised curriculum as their average scores increased. In just under half of the sample, scores remained the same, indicating no change, and in eight cases teachers scores lowered for at least one of the aspects. Training and resources have increased the extent to which teachers felt informed about the revised curriculum.

Analysis of scores from the first phase of data collection revealed a slight trend that suggested that teachers felt less well informed about the generalities of the revised curriculum, the 'curriculum objectives', compared to the more 'specific' learning objectives. However, in phase 2 this trend dissipated as scores for these general aspects in particular increased. Some teachers suggested that their scores had increased due to training, along with other formative information received via printed curriculum resources such as booklets or guidelines. Indeed, these had led to a greater awareness and understanding of what they should deliver and the areas/topics they should cover.

#### Aspects about which teachers felt most informed

The biggest increase in rating was for the aspect *'To develop the young person as an individual'*. On average, teachers from all three year groups increased their rating of this aspect by one full point. Of those who contextualised their score with a statement, several commented that this increase was associated with the training that they had received. Some reported that the training had been detailed and that they were clearer about what was expected of them in relation to this curriculum objective. Other interviewees also felt that the supporting materials from the training had been useful in developing their understanding of this aspect. The combination of training and materials amounted to an effective two pronged approach to teacher development.

### Differences in scores by year group and sector

In phase 1 of the research, post-primary teachers gave higher ratings to each of the aspects than did primary teachers (3.6 and 2.9 average ratings respectively). However, these differences also became much less apparent over time. In phase 2, the overall ratings for each of the aspects for both groups increased to 4 and 3.8 average ratings scores respectively. Primary teachers were catching up to the post-primary teachers in their scores. Indeed there was a notable increase in scores given by primary teachers particularly those in P5. Teachers in P5 average ratings scores increased the most in comparison to the other year groups for the aspects *'To develop the curriculum objectives in general'* and *'Incorporating assessment for learning'*. As outlined in Section 3, teachers of P5 reported undertaking additional training to their colleagues in P1 on InCAS and pupils profiles which may account for their increase in score over the other year groups.

### Aspects about which teachers felt less well informed

Only six of the 64 interviewees who gave ratings assigned scores to the various aspects that were lower than their original ratings, indicating that they were less informed than when they were first interviewed. Of these, five teachers were from post primary schools and one from a primary. Those who contextualised their score with a comment volunteered the view that whilst the training had informed them of theory behind the revised curriculum they still did not feel any more informed about *'how'* to implement these aspects. Some teachers commented that they were still awaiting vital curriculum related materials to determine *'what'* they would teach in September. The perceived lack of direction in terms of specific content and topic guidelines remained an issue for some interviewees. Others felt they had not had the necessary time away from class to fully inform themselves and prepare for implementation. As one post primary teacher noted:

*These (scores) have gone down, it was naivety on my part. I was listening to the propaganda coming from government that this wasn't going to be a huge change. Now I've had the training it is almost as if you have been immersed into a six foot pool and you don't know how to get out of the top of it. The training has informed me in theory about how the government would like this to happen, the theory about how*

*they would like children to learn, but the practical side of how me as a teacher coming in here on the 1st of September is going to physically do that without any research time to go into new topics, is just going to be very difficult.*

This represents a minority but significant view point, highlighting the problems of moving to a more autonomous approach. The above quote amounts to a request for training on the job. It suggests that the amount of change required of teachers was being down played. It is more than likely that some teachers will need additional support as they implement the revised curriculum.

In phase 1, one of the lowest rated aspects was *'To develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment'*. In phase 2 of the research, two thirds of teachers' scores for this aspect of the curriculum remained unchanged, thus indicating that this aspect remained a key area about which teachers felt least informed (which is reflected in their apparent reluctance to implement it (see sections 5.2 and 5.3). Teachers who commented felt that this aspect still remained a vague concept to them and that this was an area of the curriculum that had not been sufficiently addressed in the training they had received thus far. Some interviewees remained uncertain about what was required of them in the teaching of this aspect and what to cover specifically, particularly in relation to the economy. Despite remaining one of the lowest rated aspects, it is interesting to note however that where there was an increase in score this tended to be from primary teachers.

#### **4.4 The extent of teachers' confidence in taking on responsibility for aspects of the curriculum**

In the second phase of data collection, overall, interviewees' ratings scores for how confident they felt about delivering these aspects largely remained constant.

##### **Aspects teachers felt most confident about delivering**

Overall there was an average increase of 0.4 of a point for each of the ratings given by teachers on how confident they were delivering aspects of the revised curriculum. This average increase was the same for both primary and post-primary sectors. Teachers appeared marginally more confident in delivering

the generalities of the curriculum, the curriculum objectives, than they had been when they gave their first ratings. In general, however, there were only small increases in average scores over time. The aspect with the highest average rating score was *'Promoting and encouraging new learning experiences'*. This aspect also received the biggest increase in average ratings score between phase 1 and 2.

### **Aspects where teachers confidence scores remained unchanged**

Of the nine aspects presented, *'Developing attitudes and dispositions in pupils'* emerged as the one aspect where scores given by teachers (from all year groups) remained unchanged. For the most part this may indicate pre-existing high confidence. On the other hand, some comments relating to this lack of change in confidence scores acknowledged the lack of time to implement the changes, in particular, to amend lesson plans and prepare new topics. Therefore, some teachers felt unable to determine whether they were more or less confident at delivering these particular aspects at this point in time. As one primary teacher explained:

*Some of the ratings have not changed because I just think it's time again, I think time to get my head round everything, to be able to sit down and work it all out, and to look at my file and to look at it and digest and see what way I want to move.*

### **Aspects teachers felt less confident in delivering**

Nearly one third of teachers gave at least one aspect a lower rating than they had previously, indicating that they felt less confident in these areas despite the training they had received. Around three fifths of those who gave lower ratings were from primary schools.

- As in phase 1, the lowest average rating score in phase 2 was also to *'Develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment'*.
- There were also two aspects in particular where teachers rated their confidence as being lower than when they gave their initial ratings earlier in the year. These were *'Developing thinking skills and personal capabilities'* and *'Incorporating assessment for learning'*.

There were a significant number of teachers, particularly in primary schools, who reported receiving training on these two aspects and despite this, their confidence reduced. As one primary teacher noted: *'some of these things I feel worse about'*. We had some training on assessment - they touched on it but I think its very broad subject, you need a lot more.'

Other teachers who gave an explanation for their lower scores suggested that the lack of opportunity to change plans and practise the delivery of these aspects had lead to uncertainty and/or anxiety about delivering them in the next academic year. For those teachers there was a sense of urgency and panic that the revised curriculum would need to be implemented in its entirety from September onwards rather than the gradual implementation which is intended. There was also some concern about the lack of resources and in-class support to implement these aspects, for example the new assessment procedures. As one primary teacher highlighted:

*I just think I would need about three more adults in there to help me with that, I just haven't got the resources for that, to do what they're expecting us to do.*

### **Differences in confidence scores by year group and sector**

The slight variation in scores between the sectors that occurred in Phase 1 remained. Post-primary teachers were found to give moderately higher confidence ratings than primary teachers overall, particularly for the curriculum objective, *'to develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment'*. There were also differences in ratings between primary teachers, the main being that those in P5 give an average of 3.8 for their confidence rating of *'Incorporating assessment for learning'* compared with an average rating 3 for teachers in P1. This may well be because of the additional days training received by P5 teachers Unlike phase one, there was no difference in average scores between those teachers in the sample with longer teaching experience (i.e. teachers who had been teaching for 15 or more years) and those with less experience (e.g. those with 14 or less years in teaching).

## 4.5 Attitudes to the revised curriculum

### Teachers' overall attitude

Interviewees were asked the open-ended question '*What is your overall attitude to the revised curriculum now?*' Overall, **the vast majority of teachers in the sample were positive about the revised curriculum.** Of these, a small number, whilst feeling positive, also acknowledged having some concerns about its implementation. Only four individuals had wholly negative attitudes to the new curriculum overall. These teachers were all from different schools.

Of those who commented on why their attitude was positive, many acknowledged that this was because they were **confident in the theory** behind the revised curriculum and were **supportive of the main objectives and principals** it promoted. In particular, many of the interviewees were **advocates of the child-centred approach** endorsed by the revised curriculum and felt positive that this would be of significant benefit to pupils.

Those few teachers whose overall attitude towards the revised curriculum was negative reported that they perceived there to be particular **logistical difficulties** in terms of **classroom management**, impinged by a **lack of resources** which would prevent them implementing the curriculum effectively (for example, a lack of classroom assistance to support the new ways of delivery). It would seem, therefore, that those teachers were not negative about the revised curriculum per se, but negative about the logistics of implementation. The following sections present findings on the particular aspects of the revised curriculum about which teachers were enthused, as well as aspects about which they remained sceptical.

### Aspects of the revised curriculum about which teachers were particularly positive

Teachers were asked the open-ended question '*Are there any particular aspects (of the revised curriculum) you now feel particularly positive about and why?*' On the whole, it was common for interviewees to cite one (or more) of the 'curriculum objectives' and the specific learning outcomes of the curriculum they had been previously asked to rate in terms of how informed they were or how confident they were in delivering.

The most frequently cited aspect that teachers were positive about was ‘**Developing thinking skills and personal capabilities in pupils**’. Reasons for this positive attitude could be split into two broad themes. For example, one group of teachers cited this aspect because they particularly welcomed the opportunity to develop this style of teaching and were positive about the wider impact and benefits this would have for pupils, compared to the content driven nature of the existing curriculum. One interviewee expressed this by saying:

*I think that thinking skills and personal capabilities, the idea of that gives opportunities for children to develop more fully than previously, and I suppose it allows teachers to be more creative with their teaching as well, there is more scope for that.*

Post-Primary Teacher

Another group of teachers felt positive about this aspect because of their own ability to develop thinking skills in their pupils, either due to their own experience of teaching in this way currently or due to effective training and support materials that had been provided to them. Some teachers reported trying out some of the new ideas given to them at training events, and seeing the impact of this on the skills of pupils, indicating that they felt positive about delivering this aspect above some of the others.

*The thinking skills and personal capabilities I do feel very confident about because they have given us that, they’ve spoon-fed us and given us the targets in primary 1 so they are there for you and you just need to pick out the ones that you are doing with your topic which is very handy. So rather than having to dream up all of these thinking skills and personal capabilities yourself you’ve got them listed. They give us all the resources for it at the training, in the packs.*

Primary teacher

The next most frequently cited aspect of the curriculum that teachers felt particularly positive about was ‘**Incorporating assessment for learning**’. A number of teachers welcomed this approach to assessment and concluded that the benefits of this was that it allowed young people to take greater ownership of their learning and that they would become more aware of their own capabilities than is currently the case with existing forms of assessment. The learning intentions and success criteria set out for this aspect were also felt to be ‘*very useful.*’

Another aspect that teachers voiced particular optimism about implementing was ‘**making connections across the learning areas**’. Some teachers had already begun to incorporate this into their teaching over the course of this year and found that it had worked well. Others felt positive about this, as they believed their subject lent itself particularly well to cross curricular teaching (e.g. maths).

Of the nine aspects of the revised curriculum as labelled in the big picture, the only one that teachers in the sample did not cite as being positive about was ‘*Developing the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment.*’ Given that teachers scored this lowest in terms of being informed and confident about, this was not unexpected (see section 4.4).

Aside from these specific aspects of the curriculum, some teachers cited being positive about the more general objectives of the revised curriculum. Teachers were particularly positive about the **increased flexibility** that the new curriculum offers. Moreover, they welcomed that the curriculum is not ‘directed’ and there is greater freedom for teachers to determine topics and thus meet the needs of individual pupils. The practical nature of the curriculum with its strong **emphasis on skills** was another attribute that enthused teachers, as did the **reduced focus on content**. Indeed, the promotion of **active learning methods** meant that teachers felt that the revised curriculum would make learning more enjoyable for children, which was positive. Teachers welcomed the opportunity to **develop new topics** within a wider curriculum than at present, suggesting that this would make their teaching more relevant and accessible. Interviewees were also enthused that the revised curriculum involved a more cross curricular approach and welcomed greater collaboration between departments.

Others commented that their positive attitude corresponded to the belief that the revised curriculum would not necessitate significant changes to their own **current teaching practice**. However, some of these same teachers acknowledged that other schools would need significant change in their practice in order to implement it. In addition, some teachers were positive because they had observed some of the new ways of working and had **seen the new ideas and concepts work** with pupils. Further reasons for positive attitudes related to practicalities, such as the perceived **likelihood of less**

**paper work.** Finally, some teachers expressed that their own outlook was positive generally and that they were **personally motivated by change.**

### **Aspects of the revised curriculum about which teachers felt sceptical**

Teachers were asked if there were any aspects of the revised curriculum that they felt partially sceptical about and why. Of the specific curriculum objectives, teachers were particularly sceptical about ‘**developing the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment**’. Several primary teachers queried the relevance of this for those in the lower age groups. As one teacher commented:

*These are not concepts that they (pupils) think about, they don't think about their futures that much, they are not at that stage of development yet.*

(Primary 5 teacher)

Others were sceptical because they felt they lacked understanding about this aspect and were unclear about what was expected of them in terms of delivery. This in turn, led some teachers to feel less confident about it and as one commented, ‘*even the words (economy and environment) scare me*’. Other interviewees felt that it would be difficult to impact on pupils perceptions of the economy and environment ‘*I can't think how I can make great deal of difference to that, I really don't*’. In this respect, teachers believed further training on this aspect was required so that they could effectively incorporate it into their teaching particularly in the primary setting.

‘**Incorporating assessment for learning**’ was also an area where some teachers remained doubtful. Some felt this aspect had not been covered sufficiently in training thus far. Whilst others expressed concern that assessing children this way would be too onerous on teacher's time.

A number of interviewees also commented that they were sceptical about **InCAS** and the computer based testing of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

- Some teachers felt that the training in this area had not prepared them well enough to begin testing pupils in the Autumn term.

- Some felt that it would have been useful to have observed children undertaking the tests in order to prepare themselves for the potential difficulties that may arise.
- A few teachers commented on the lack of ICT facilities in school which meant that assessing a whole class would be difficult.
- One teacher felt sceptical because s/he felt that the tests themselves were inadequate as they were not ‘child friendly’.

Other areas that teachers remained sceptical about included the **appropriateness and applicability of the curriculum** for children with special educational needs, who required a more structured learning approach and who did not respond well to active learning methods or group work. Indeed, a few teachers were concerned that the revised curriculum concentrated too much on **active learning** and that independent learning had been neglected. Finally, some teachers were sceptical about the **reduced content** and the uncertainty over transfer tests, acknowledging that if the transfer tests were to remain, children would be at a disadvantage.

## 4.6 Key points

- The biggest increase in rating score was for the aspect *‘To develop the young person as an individual’*. On average, teachers from all three year groups increased their rating of how well they were informed about this aspect by one full point. This would suggest that the training received by teachers in this area had been effective.
- *‘To develop the young person as a contributor to economy and environment’* was an area many teachers felt least informed about and less confident about delivering. This may reflect the questioning of the relevance of this objective and the view that they had received little training on this aspect specifically.
- Some interviewees volunteered the view that whilst the training had informed them of theory behind the revised curriculum they still did not feel any more informed about *‘how’* to implement many of these aspects. Examples of how this can be achieved may need to be picked up in future training of further year groups as the implementation process rolls out.
- Teacher’s confidence in delivering the revised curriculum had only increased to a small extent. However, it was acknowledged that this was due in the most part to the lack of opportunity and time to absorb some of the revised curriculum training and materials do this in their own classrooms thus far.
- The most frequently cited aspect that teachers were positive about was *‘Developing thinking skills and personal capabilities in pupils’*.

- Teachers were positive about the curriculum as a whole, and in particular the increased flexibility it offered and likely benefits it would have for their pupils.
- There was mixed views on ‘incorporating assessment for learning’. While some teachers were particularly positive about it others were more sceptical about implementing this aspect citing concerns about impacts on teacher time as well as the need for further training.
- Teachers raised concerns about InCAS testing and logistical difficulties associated with it.
- Of the curriculum objectives, the aspect ‘developing the young person as contributor to the economy and environment’ emerged as a particularly problematic issue for teachers in that it was often the aspect they least well informed about and least confident to deliver.
- Limited resources made teachers sceptical about implementing the revised curriculum as did time and the appropriateness of the curriculum for children with SEN.

## 5 Prognosis for future implementation

This chapter sets out how teachers and principals see the coming year of starting the implementation process in classrooms. It examines

- perceptions of the preparedness of schools
- the implementation plans in schools for the coming year
- the remaining perceived barriers to implementation and the additional support required.

### 5.1 Changes in perceptions of school preparedness

#### School preparedness

Teachers were asked again to assess the preparedness of their school to implement the revised curriculum.

The **vast majority of post-primary teachers** considered their school to be **very well prepared** and approximately **three quarters of the primary teachers** were **cautiously optimistic** that their school was prepared for the coming implementation. Reasons for some teachers not feeling prepared included: feeling overwhelmed and needing more planning time, resources or training.

In comparison to how prepared teachers felt at the beginning of the training about their schools' preparedness, this remains largely unchanged, since a quarter of teachers had then reported feeling that their school was not adequately prepared. This apparently unchanging perception may relate more to attitudes to change itself than to the revised curriculum per se.

### Teachers' attitudes

Teachers were also asked how they would characterise the various attitudes of the staff to the implementation process now.

On the whole **post-primary teachers were more positive than their primary school counterparts** with about two thirds reporting that staff attitudes in their school were largely positive (compared to fewer than half of primary teachers reporting the same). The remaining teachers who reported less favourable attitudes towards the implementation of the curriculum attributed this to staff feeling overwhelmed, anxious and lacking in confidence.

### Principals

Over four fifths of principals assessed their staffs' attitudes to implementation as positive. However, as reported in chapter 2 the current uncertainty surrounding the transfer test was causing some primary principals concern, since the revised curriculum is to be implemented in P6 next year. It was asserted by several heads that academic selection is not compatible with the revised curriculum, and consequently there remains anxiety over how and when this issue will be resolved.

## 5.2 Planned implementation for the coming year

All teachers were asked which aspects of the revised curriculum they would be implementing over the coming year. (It should be borne in mind that interviews were conducted very shortly after the announcement that the Department did not expect schools to have all elements in place during the coming year.)

## Primary teachers

Approximately two fifths of the P1 and P5 teachers interviewed were planning to implement all aspects of the revised curriculum. Within this group some teachers were planning to implement each aspect of the curriculum equally whereas some teachers were planning to implement all aspects, but with a more concentrated focus on certain areas such as, for example, assessment for learning.

*I would be hoping to be doing a little bit of all of those things...but if we have to focus on one, give one a higher priority, I think our school is intending to go for the “Incorporating assessment for learning” and trying to get children to assess their own learning.*

Primary 5 teacher

Another two fifths of primary teachers were planning to implement the revised curriculum but with the exception of one or two areas. Teachers appeared most reluctant to implement: the young person as a contributor to society, and the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment. This reluctance seemed to be rooted in teachers’ lack of confidence and information about what was being asked of them or how these should be implemented.

*Contributor to society... I’m scared of that one because I’m not overly sure really what they’re looking for from us...*

Primary 1 teacher

One fifth of teachers were planning to only implement one or two aspects of the curriculum. These were most likely to be areas that they felt most confident about either because these areas were well resourced, because they already had experience of incorporating it in their lessons, or because they felt they had received sufficient training. Such areas included personal development and mutual understanding and thinking skills.

## Post-primary teachers

Two fifths of the KS3 teachers interviewed were planning to implement all the curriculum over the coming year; half were planning to implement all but one or two areas and just a tenth of teachers were planning to implement *only* one or two areas. There were no apparent differences between the secondary and grammar sectors in terms of how much of the curriculum they were planning

to implement. The areas that teachers were most likely to leave out and *not* address in the coming year included: assessment for learning, the young person as a contributor to society and the young person as a contributor to the environment.

For nearly a quarter of teachers (both primary and post-primary) there appeared to be lack of clarity around how the general objectives linked into specific aspects of the revised curriculum. In particular some teachers said that they were planning to implement all *aspects* of the revised curriculum (i.e. thinking skills and personal capabilities, connections across the learning areas, etc) yet were planning to leave out, for example, the young person as a contributor to society, which is a general objective.

Although teachers had been told that they could implement the revised curriculum gradually and in stages, it seemed that for some there was confusion over how this could actually be achieved in practice. For example, some teachers, while stating their intention to implement all of the revised curriculum, specifically excluded ‘promoting and encouraging new learning experiences’. This might suggest a degree of conceptual confusion about the revised curriculum. The point was raised by some principals that the revised curriculum does not naturally lend itself to gradual implementation, given that it is based on a completely different teaching method. Some teachers sought further clarity and guidance about how they could in practice implement the revised curriculum gradually. Others noted that vague timescales for implementation, whilst being beneficial and not adding to teachers’ stress or causing them to feel anxious about the implementation process, meant that some teachers could become lethargic about making the necessary changes.

### **5.3 Outstanding barriers and additional support**

Teachers were asked whether they thought there were any particular barriers facing implementation in their school and to identify any additional support needs.

### Primary teachers

Over three quarters of P1 and P5 teachers interviewed thought that the following barriers still remained in relation to the implementation of the revised curriculum:

- Resources: including lack of money, materials, computers and adequately sized school buildings or classrooms.
- Time: to read the materials, plan, prepare and to meet with other colleagues.
- Classroom assistants: there were calls for classroom assistants in P5 classes due to the nature of the activities related to the revised curriculum.
- Staff attitudes: fear and reluctance to embrace another change.
- Parental attitudes: parental expectations will need to change.

A third of teachers also identified further training as an important additional source of support. This training included general training as well as more specific training on the young person as a contributor to society and the economy and environment and assessment for learning.

### Post-primary teachers

Over two thirds of the KS3 teachers interviewed thought that barriers to the implementation of the revised curriculum still remained. These barriers, however, were largely the same as those mentioned by primary school teachers and differed only in terms of priority:

- Staff attitudes: this included teacher cynicism and negativity (particularly with older staff) and a dislike of the *'new way of working'*
- Time: to reflect, map, plan and meet.
- Resources: including lack of money, materials and computers.

When interviewed at the start of this process, before the training for the implementation began, teachers were asked this same question with regard to perceived barriers. At that time they considered the main barriers to implementation to be lack of time, resources and parental attitudes and expectations.

Over a third of post-primary teachers stated that they felt they needed additional support in the form of cluster groups and further training, particularly on assessment for learning.

Teachers from both sectors felt that lack of time to prepare for implementation as well as the pace at which the new curriculum was being implemented was a barrier. Teachers felt that the implementation process was somewhat rushed and that there was not enough time to allow teachers and schools to get up to speed. The lack of preparedness was a concern partially because of potential negative impacts this would have on pupils in P1, P5 and KS3 in the upcoming academic year. (For example, teachers were concerned that those pupils involved in this exploratory year or curriculum implementation could be at a disadvantage should transfer tests remain.)

## Principals

Over half of the primary school principals were still concerned about having sufficient time and resources to properly implement the revised curriculum. However, two additional but very clear concerns also emerged:

- Over a third of principals were concerned about pupil assessment and the use of InCAS. These concerns included not having sufficient computers to test all the children; concerns around the considerable difficulties with the software and teachers' lack of confidence in using the system.
- Over a third of principals were concerned about the lack of clarity that they perceived to exist regarding the 'nuts and bolts' of the revised curriculum. There was uncertainty as to '*what the revised curriculum should look like*' and it appeared that, for some, the training had not adequately addressed the practicalities of implementation as it was too theory driven and not sufficiently practice driven.

There were no obvious barriers emerging from the responses of the post-primary principals.

Although a considerable majority of teachers identified remaining barriers to implementation, this should be seen in the context of the majority also having a positive view of the preparedness of their school for implementation. Although most are not expecting to implement all of the revised curriculum during the course of the coming year, the intention of the vast majority is to make considerable headway.

## 5.4 Key points

- The majority of teachers in both sectors were largely positive about the prognosis for implementing the revised curriculum in the coming year.
- Teachers sought further guidance on how the revised curriculum could be introduced gradually and how the general objectives linked into the more specific aspects.
- Teachers lacked confidence and were least likely to incorporate particular parts of the curriculum; the young person as a contributor to society and the economy and environment this coming year.
- Many teachers continued to consider time and resources to be the two major barriers to effective implementation.
- In order to be able to use InCAS properly in October, primary schools needed sufficient numbers of computers, and teachers required further training in using it.
- Some primary principals stated the need to receive training themselves in the revised curriculum itself to enable them to lead its implementation effectively.
- Primary principals sought resolution regarding the apparent contradiction between academic selection and the revised curriculum before it is implemented in P6.
- Further training was identified by both sectors as necessary for the continued implementation of the revised curriculum.

## 6 Progress since the first report

This section of the report examines the extent to which progress has taken place since this evaluation began, by re-visiting the Logic Model presented in the initial report of May 2006. . It outlines the initial concerns and addresses the progress made for each of these in turn.

### 6.1 Areas of progress

Data collection for this evaluation began in the Autumn Term of 2005. The first report was submitted in May 2006. It addressed a number of concerns raised by members of the PMB, by principals and teachers and by representatives of agencies that (at that time) were interested observers of the process.

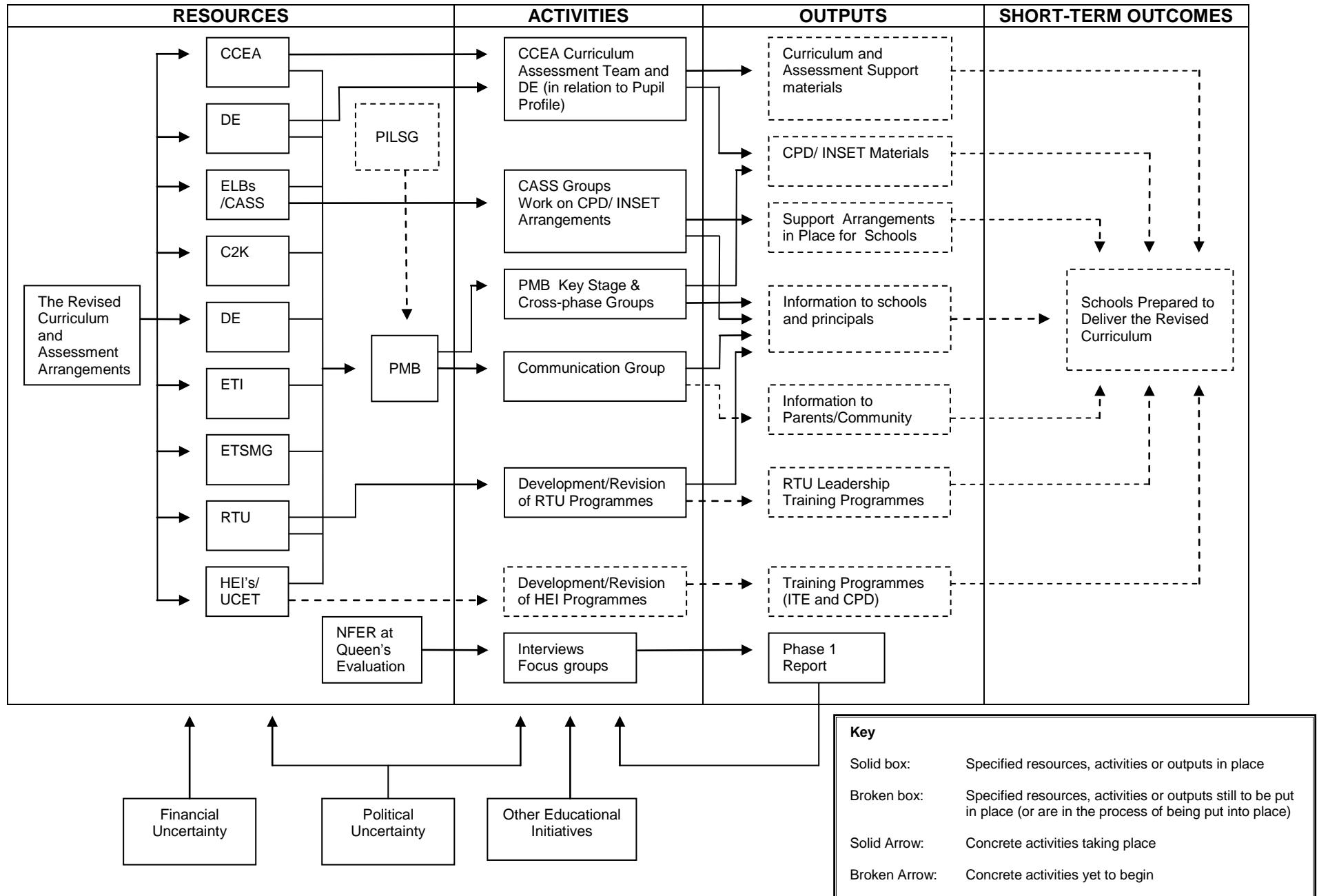
At that time, a number of issues were exercising the minds of many of the parties. These included:

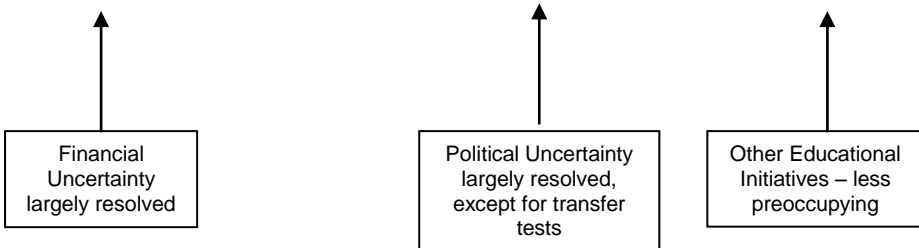
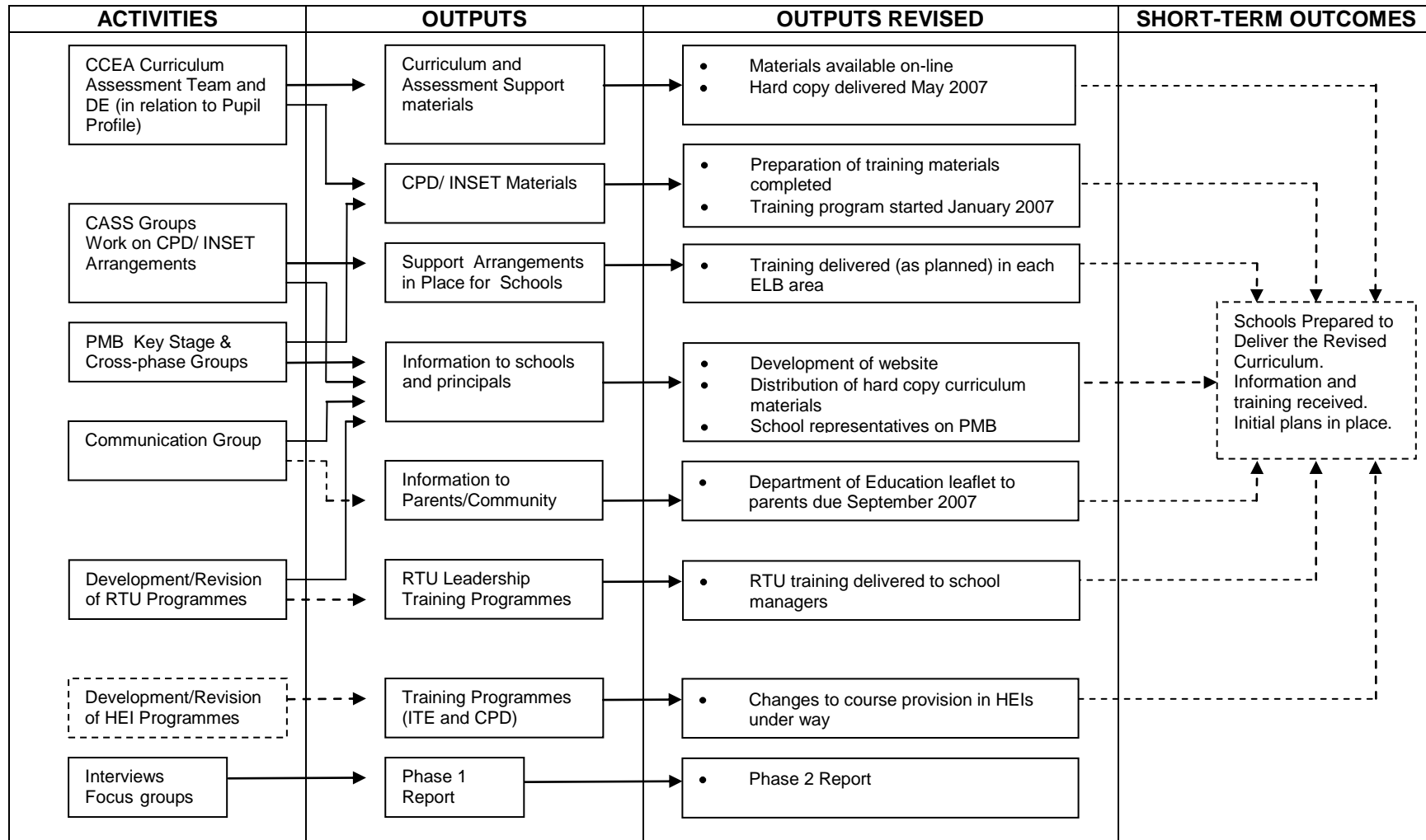
- political uncertainty concerning the status of the revised curriculum
- uncertainty concerning the resources available to support implementation
- lack of knowledge in schools about the nature and content of the revised curriculum
- concerns about the communication of information to schools and parents
- delays in distributing the curriculum materials to schools
- delay in involving the HEIs in preparing new teachers for the revised curriculum.

2006/7 saw a step change from planning support for curriculum implementation to the delivery of that support. Consequently the preoccupying issues have changed, as has the attitude to the process itself.

The Logic Model diagram presented in the first report identified a range of activities and outputs that were in preparation, but not yet fully developed. The following section identifies the extent to which there has been progress on each of the items set out in that diagram.

The next page reproduces the Logic Model presented in the report of May 2006. It is followed by an updated version of that diagram, depicting the progress made in the implementation process since that date. These diagrams are followed by a commentary on the changes in the diagram.





**Key**

- Solid box: Specified resources, activities or outputs in place
- Broken box: Specified resources, activities or outputs still to be put in place (or are in the process of being put into place)
- Solid Arrow: Concrete activities taking place
- Broken Arrow: Concrete activities yet to begin

### **The curriculum and assessment support materials**

The materials for schools were initially scheduled for distribution at the start of the 2006/7 academic year. The 'hard copy' curriculum boxes were delivered to schools in May 2007, although the materials were previously available on line. Schools have expressed considerable admiration for the documentation and presentation, but were disturbed that the late arrival prejudiced their capacity to use the documents to prepare in time for the start of 2007/8.

### **CPD/INSET materials**

The various working groups have completed their preparation of training materials and the training programme started at the beginning of 2007. It is our understanding that a verbal report from ETI on their inspections of the training regarded the training as coherent and consistent across the ELBs.

### **Information for schools and principals**

Communication with schools was seen to be amongst the most critical issues needing to be addressed in early 2006. Since then a number of key strategies have been developed, most significant being:

- the development of a website;
- the distribution of the Curriculum Boxes (see above);
- the introduction of school and teachers' unions representatives onto PMB
- the establishment of the Principals Forum.

Some principals still believe that they themselves are under-informed about the revised curriculum, but this may be seen as a training issue rather than just a communications issue.

### **Information to parents and the community**

In the early stages of the evaluation, school principals were most concerned that parents were not being informed and reassured about the revised curriculum. As the institutions closest to the parents, it might be asserted that schools are in the best position to inform and engage parents. However, they

believed that the Department of Education had a responsibility to state the case for the changes proposed, and the Department has agreed to do so through a leaflet to parents in September 2007. A number of principals argued that some parents would not accept an educational approach that does not focus clearly on measurable academic results or preparation for transfer tests, which some believe will be retained in one form or another.

### **RTU leadership training programmes**

The RTU has delivered leadership training for school principals and senior managers, focussing on implementing assessment change. Satisfaction scores in the RTU conducted evaluation of the conference were uniformly high for organisation/materials/facilitators, for quality of conference venue and for learning outcomes. While the quality of what has been delivered has been welcomed, complaints remain that primary principals have not been sufficiently informed through training about the content of the curriculum itself. Some principals assert that their staff have been supported more than they have, leading to a breakdown in the collegial approach usually taken by some principals.

### **Training programmes (ITE and CPD)**

While HEIs have been making changes in their course provision to reflect the changes that the revised curriculum will bring, there has been concern that they were not brought into the process sufficiently early, and that they may still be needing to make more changes if newly qualified teachers are to enter the profession sufficiently prepared to teach to the revised curriculum.

### **Contextual issues**

The Logic Model also identified key contextual issues that were deemed to be significant factors in the implementation process.

First amongst these was political uncertainty, which at that time was deemed to have two potentially damaging potential outcomes: the abandonment of the revised curriculum itself and/or the retention of the transfer tests, which it was believed could render the revised curriculum unworkable in many primary schools. The former possible outcome has clearly been avoided, with the

revised curriculum now enshrined in statute law. The fate of transfer tests remains unresolved, with implications as described in Section 2 above.

Uncertainty concerning funding to support the implementation process itself was another key issue. This has been resolved (though not to universal satisfaction, as is so often the case with financial decisions) in that the initial funding for teacher CPD is now secured.

The plethora of educational initiatives, forming a crowded change scenario, was thought to have the potential to at least impair the implementation process, with schools having to manage too many demands on their time. During the 2007 data collection, 'initiative overload' was not volunteered as a barrier to the implementation of the revised curriculum as it had been in earlier data collections.

### **Management of the programme by PMB**

The above points address progress achieved in those areas that were identified in the Logic model as awaiting attention or completion in 2006. The following observations are offered from a researcher perspective, based on attendance at PMB meetings conducted over the last two years.

The status of the PMB resides entirely in the status and influence of its constituent members. Its capacity to manage the process of implementation is therefore dependent entirely upon the cooperation and collaboration between those members. This has taken place in a context of some insecurity for the staff of those bodies as the RPA unfolds. There have been delays on certain issues, and on some issues those managing the process have responded to outside concerns and criticisms. At times PMB has seemed to operate as buffer zone between policy makers and schools, and without its coordinating function one can only assume that the process would have been much more difficult than it has been.

PMB has established an effective modus operandi, receiving reports from its various partners, addressing issues that might otherwise lead to conflict or confusion and establishing strategies for progressing the endeavour in as much as its limited powers permit. At times a frustration with the slowness of the political decision making process has been expressed in PMB. Throughout this

the group has continued to take a very active responsibility for advancing the implementation in a coherent way across all of Northern Ireland. The example set by PMB of a partnership between education agencies is seen by some as a valuable model for the administrative environment that will emerge from the review of public administration.

## 6.2 Key points

- The revised curriculum implementation process has effectively moved from planning to preparation.
- Most aspects of support identified in May 2006 as still needing to be put in place have now been addressed.
- An outstanding item, informing parents about the revised curriculum, is due to be addressed in September 2007.
- There was some delay in the distribution of the Curriculum boxes, and also in the start date of training for teachers.
- Information to schools and teachers has been substantially improved through a range of strategies.
- The constituent membership of the PMB has been adjusted to better include the views of school principals and teachers.

## 7 Summary of the key issues

This chapter sets out the key issues that have emerged through the evaluation to date, focussing on those positive outcomes upon which the implementation process can capitalise, and issues that may need further attention.

### Positivity and commitment among teachers

There was a widespread view among principals that there was now greater **enthusiasm and commitment among staff towards the revised curriculum** and that this had been one of the biggest successes to come out of this first year. Principals felt that teachers were now taking ownership of the new curriculum, they were evidencing changes in their teaching practice and had confidence in disseminating this to others (when they had time to do so). Indeed, some principals reported a greater sense of **teamwork and collective responsibility** among staff as a whole. Teachers themselves concurred with this view, reporting themselves to be more informed about the revised curriculum and largely **positive about the prognosis for implementing** in the coming year. It is important, therefore, to capitalise on this positive attitude and take forward the forthcoming implementation year in this same vein.

### Success of training to date

In terms of successes, training was delivered as planned in each of ELB areas and was, on the whole, **effective in informing teachers about the various aspects of the revised curriculum**. This was particularly so in the primary sector, where scores for being informed about the revised curriculum were seen to increase the most. There was some variation in reception amongst teachers to the appropriateness of the training they received. However, this may be inevitable due to a wide range of previous curriculum approaches and the individual experience of those involved.

The primary training appeared to be more uniform than was the case in post-primary schools which had capacity to tailor their training more through curriculum leaders and self-determined needs. In this way, their training was more autonomous.

### **Disparity between schools**

There were great disparities between schools in the sample, about their attitude to the revised curriculum itself and about the aspects of it that they planned to implement in the next year. There was also disparity in perceptions of teachers' capacity to train up other staff to teach the revised curriculum and concerning the differences in parent's expectations. These factors were deemed to be having varying levels of impact in different schools.

Overall, there appeared to be greater difficulties facing primary schools in implementing the revised curriculum than was the case with post-primary schools. It may be appropriate to explore any possibility of re-focussing some support in recognition of this apparent disparity, which itself is recognised by post-primary principals.

Because of the different starting points of schools, the revised curriculum training could not be expected to fulfil all schools needs. Schools are now expected to analyse their own training needs and act accordingly. There may be a case for groups of schools to cluster to decide on the training that they collectively need. There was also a suggestion that future training for primary schools should be more 'in house' with specialists coming into school rather than teachers going out to attend uniform training events.

### **Transfer tests and the revised curriculum**

Although the issue of transfer tests was not explored through direct questions, almost half of primary principals (two thirds of these from controlled schools) volunteered it as an issue during the course of their discussions. Due to the uncertainty concerning the future of transfer tests, some primary school principals remained reluctant to make rapid progress in implementing the revised curriculum, since it would not support them in preparing pupils for the test if it were to remain. Until there is further clarity in terms of political commitment for or against transfer tests and until this is communicated to teachers and parents, a thoroughly revised curriculum may not be implemented or welcomed by all schools. There was also some concern about the lack of clarity and definition about the extent the revised curriculum needs to be implemented prior to 2010. These two factors could combine to result in some schools maintaining a pre-revised curriculum approach while others

embraced it more thoroughly. In order to preclude this danger the following might be considered:

- The Assembly, now in position, needs to acknowledge that the implementation of the revised curriculum and the future of transfer arrangements are inextricably linked issues.
- Notwithstanding other factors, an early decision concerning transfer tests would support more effective implementation of the revised curriculum.
- It may be appropriate to explain more vigorously the wider benefits of the as well as what revised curriculum is not intended to, and will not, diminish the potential for pupils to achieve high academic standards.

### **Areas of perceived difficulty**

Overall the concept of the revised curriculum was welcomed, with very few teachers expressing negative views about it. Of those who were sceptical, in the most part, this was due to concerns about the logistics of implementation, including both the timing of implementation and teacher time to prepare for it. One area of the curriculum, however, that remained vague and uncertain for many teachers, was the objective to ‘develop the young person as a contributor to the economy and environment’. This perhaps indicates that further training and support in this area is required for teachers of P1, P5 and KS3.

### **Outstanding training issues**

Some primary principals stated the need to receive training themselves in the revised curriculum itself if they are to lead its implementation effectively. Some teachers also required further guidance on how the revised curriculum can be introduced gradually and how the general objectives link into the more specific aspects. They required further examples of how this can be achieved. Previous research (Joyce & Showers, 1980, Fullan 2001) identifies the need for ongoing support to teachers as they develop their own practice and for the whole school staff including principals to be directly engaged.

### **Timescales of implementation**

There also remained concern among principals about the decision made by the Department of Education to hold to 2007/8 as the first year of implementation, even if it is described as a transition year. Schools would now appear to have

discretion concerning the amount of implementation that they undertake during the coming year. But there would appear to be little definition about what would constitute a sufficient amount of progress, which may itself lead to some confusion in the future. Indeed, some interviewees felt that the revised curriculum did not lend itself to gradual implementation. Others noted that vague timescales, whilst being beneficial and not adding to teachers' stress or causing them to feel anxious about the implementation process, meant that some teachers could become lethargic about making the necessary changes.

### Substitute teachers

In addition to the inevitable disruption of using substitute teachers and the costs involved, some principals claimed that there was a lack of local availability of substitute teachers, especially at times when group training was taking place. With the plan to roll out the revised curriculum over a sustained period, it may be appropriate to attend further to the local availability of substitute teachers at times of high demand, and to ensure that schools are more fully informed of available substitutes.

### ITT/NQT issues

Some concern was expressed about the extent to which Initial Teacher Training courses had adapted to meet the needs of the revised curriculum. There was concern about the preparedness of NQTs teaching the revised curriculum from September onwards. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to investigate this further but the support and training needs of NQTs in P1 P5 and KS3 may need to be investigated in the next academic year so that any discernible areas of difficulty can be addressed.

### Permission or prescription?

The revised curriculum is seen to offer greater flexibility to schools, and to individual teachers, to decide the content and the style of delivery of the curriculum. Some teachers appear to wholeheartedly welcome this granting of **permission** to create the curriculum. Others feel less confident, and express the need for more **prescription**. Balancing this permission/prescription conundrum, by acknowledging individual positions and supporting accordingly, will remain one of the challenges of the implementation process.

## 8 Recommendations for further evaluation

This final chapter suggests further evaluation that might support the continuing implementation process as it rolls out to other year groups.

This report represents the final stage of the current contract between the PMB and NFER at Queens for the evaluation of the implementation process. However, this happens at a fairly early stage of the entire project. PMB may wish to commission further research in the future. To date the research has been largely formative, its purpose to:

- inform policy decisions concerning the implementation of the new curriculum
- enable the planning and management of implementation to be refined throughout the period of change, helping managers to make appropriate modifications, while maintaining a constant vision for the project; and thereby
- minimise the risks and maximise the opportunities associated with change.

As from September 2007 there will be the opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the revised curriculum within the classroom for years 1 and 5 and for key stage 3. Having moved from planning to preparation, the process now moves from preparation to implementation. There will also be the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which lessons learned in preparing those year groups are being applied in preparing subsequent year groups.

It will be the responsibility of ETI to ascertain the extent to which the requirements of The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 are being met in schools.

### 8.1 Potential evaluation approaches for the future

Having incorporated a range of research techniques to date in this evaluation, we believe that it would now be possible to formulate survey questions in a form that could usefully inform the study while still being manageable for teachers in terms of time needed to complete. This could result in statistically

robust findings, but they would inevitable be somewhat superficial unless accompanied by further qualitative research.

We would suggest that it would be appropriate to conduct further data collection in each of the 25 schools who participated in this current strand of the evaluation to investigate their experiences in implementing the revised curriculum at classroom level from September 2007 onwards.

From this one could undertake more detailed research in a small number of school best practice case studies to depict successful implementation in greater detail, through interviews with managers, teachers, pupils and parents, and through observations. This would effectively reflect the holistic nature of the revised curriculum itself, by exploring the extent to which features such as connected learning and the development of thinking skills are being addressed school-wide.

Two further strands of evaluation might be considered:

- A new study of pupils' perceptions of the revised curriculum, which might usefully make comparisons with the findings of the NFER curriculum cohort study that was completed in 2005.
- A study of teacher perceptions of teaching to the revised curriculum, which itself could provide a valuable comparison with the pupils' perceptions study.

Finally, if more tentatively, it may be appropriate to research the extent to which initial teacher education is keeping pace with the revised curriculum as it emerges through practice.

NFER at Queens would be happy to discuss the various possibilities with PMB.

## Appendix 1

Teachers have expressed considerable enthusiasm for the revised curriculum, and have stated their intention to undertake very substantial implementation of it during the coming academic year. They have welcomed the Curriculum Box and have increased their knowledge of the curriculum during the past year.

However, they have also expressed concern about the logistics of implementation. Their experience reflects that of educators across the world when faced with substantial change processes. Michael Fullan, in ‘The New Meaning of Educational Change’ sets out the various challenges and pitfalls that need to be overcome if curriculum change is to take place and become embedded. He crystallises the issues in a set of ten assumptions, some of which should be embraced, and some avoided. These are set out below with a commentary on how they play out in the context of curriculum change in Northern Ireland.

- ***Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented.***

The Northern Ireland revised curriculum is designed to be adaptable to the local needs of schools and teachers. However, it contains basic values which the evidence of this research suggests is shared by a clear majority of teachers. The extent to which those values, and the content set out, will be implemented is yet to become apparent. It is not unlikely that the revised curriculum itself will be revised through practice.

- ***Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning.***

So far teachers have been introduced to the revised curriculum. Most welcome it wholeheartedly, but remain uncertain about some aspects of it. There is some evidence to suggest that some teachers would prefer the meaning and content of the revised curriculum to be more fully set out to them, while others relish the new autonomy that is offered to them. The extent to which individual interpretations of the revised curriculum emerge is yet to become apparent. Some are already creating their own versions, while others appear to hanker for more prescription.

- ***Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change.***

There has been little evidence of conflict concerning the nature and content of the revised curriculum to date. Any conflict has been more associated with the logistics of the process, including timing, funding and staffing. However, it may well be that as teachers put the ideas of the revised curriculum into practice there will be more scope for conflicting interpretations to surface. If

this can be encouraged to lead to an on-going debate about the nature of learning and the needs of learners, then the process of revision in the future could be constant rather than occasional or sudden.

- ***Assume that people need pressure to change (even in directions that they desire).***

As yet, there has been no requirement for teachers to change their practice. Indeed, the ministerial pronouncement of May 24<sup>th</sup> and subsequent letter to principals suggests a ‘back-pedaling’ of pressure implement the revised curriculum. If the final deadline (2010) for implementation is to be achieved it may well be necessary in some schools to exert pressure, although the current evidence would suggest a very considerable willingness in most schools to progress the implementation as quickly as possible. It may in the future be advisable to focus on using the developed practice of front-runner schools to support those making slower progress.

- ***Assume that effective change takes time. It is a process of “development in use.”***

Time and timing remain the greatest causes of concern for those charged with implementing the revised curriculum. The majority of teachers express concern that they will not have the time to absorb the new requirements and make the necessary preparations to effectively implement. Many principals are clearly concerned that the timetable for implementation is too short. However, there is a widespread positive prognosis for implementation in the coming year. Managing steady progress towards 2010 may prove challenging in some schools.

- ***Do not assume that the reason for lack of implementation is outright rejection of the values embodied in the change, or hard-core resistance to all change.***

Support for the revised curriculum remains very high and widespread. Reservations concerning implementation remain the logistical issues of introducing it in the specified period.

- ***Do not expect all or even most people or groups to change. Progress occurs when we take steps that increase the number of people affected.***

There would appear to be a minority of teachers resistant to the revised curriculum itself, and a slightly larger group expressing real scepticism about the practicality of implementing it. According to their own testament, most teachers will willingly introduce the approaches and content of the revised curriculum as quickly as practicalities will permit. According to those interviewed in this research, one might reasonably expect a critical mass of change to be achieved fairly quickly, which in itself will encourage others to follow.

- ***Assume that you will need a plan that is based on the above assumptions and that addresses the factors known to affect implementation.***

The planning process, overseen by PMB, has had to cope with certain delays in decision making, most of which are now resolved. However, the process

has some way to go, with all remaining year groups to be included. Resources, support and training will need to remain in place throughout the process. There is already some resentment that the current process is not as well resourced as the pilot projects. Further depletion of resourced support could jeopardize the whole endeavour.

- ***Assume that no amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken.***

At the teacher level, this issue seems to present problems for a minority of interviewees. Several still seek details of lesson plans and demonstrations of what is required of them. For some teachers, moving out of their comfort zone is likely to be problematic. Teachers, like pupils, will need to adopt a different relationship to knowledge. While some welcome the permission to explore, others feel less confident and seek more prescription. Balancing and addressing these two needs may need continued attention.

- ***Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations.***

The data would suggest that some schools are collectively more advanced in their espousal of the revised curriculum than others. It may be appropriate to seek out ways of sharing progress to bring some schools forward more quickly. It may well be that a critical mass of implementation will in itself ensure that those schools with furthest to travel will be drawn forward. Only if the entire community of schools advances together can the revised curriculum be embedded.

## References

CEA (2006). *InCAS Interpretation of Data Seminar: Interim Evaluation Report*. Northern Ireland: CEA.

Education and Library Boards (ELB) (2007). *ELB Evaluation of Primary Revised Curriculum Training*. Internal Report. Northern Ireland: ELB.

Education and Library Boards (ELB) (2007). *ELB Evaluation of Post-Primary Revised Curriculum Training*. Internal Report. Northern Ireland: ELB.

Fullan M. (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. 3rd Edition. London: Teachers College Press.

General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) (2007). *Survey of Teachers 2006*. London: PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1980). Improving In-Service Training: The Messages of Research, *Educational Leadership*, 37, pp379-385.

Regional Training Unit (RTU) (2007). *Leading Learning Primary - Implementing Assessment Change*. Conference Evaluation Report. Northern Ireland: RTU.