



DIRECTOR GENERAL

LETTER CIRCULAR

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To: All Heads of School (State & Non-State) and Sections

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Subject: Interim Report on the NCF Consultation Process

A. The Draft National Curriculum Framework

In Malta we need an education system that prepares students not only for today but also for a demanding and more socially active society of the future. Our curriculum should enable children and young people to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them life long learners, who become actively engaged citizens and who are capable of sustaining their life chances in the changing world of work.

This National Curriculum Framework (NCF) calls for greater responsibility at all levels as educators together with other stakeholders engage to create the *essential education programme* for all children to succeed. The intent of this NCF is to make a powerful case for reviewing, overhauling, updating and injecting new life into our curriculum – formal, informal and non-formal. It aims both to provoke and to challenge our thinking, whilst providing insight and inspiration into the various challenges that await us. It presents a focus on content and process, on programme structure, on the role of technology, on globalisation and sustainability, and on the need to develop the habits of mind required for the 21st century.

B. The Consultation Process

The NCF was launched on the 17th of May 2011. The consultation process was planned to be complete by the end of 2011, but in reality feedback received in 2012 was also considered. The sources of the feedback are the following:

- The meetings with teachers, parents and students held in all the state colleges and in non-state schools;
- Over **60 meetings** with a wide variety of entities, constituted bodies and civil society;
- The **questionnaire** disseminated to school staff;
- **Two electronic questionnaires** one for primary school students for which 2,393 replies were received, and one for secondary school students for which 2,607 replies were received;
- The **National Children's Conference** held in November 2011;
- The **National NCF Conference** held in December 2011;
- The **Science Seminar** organized in October 2011 by the Malta Association of Science Educators;

- **191 feedback documents** sent from the State school Colleges and non-state schools; staff from the two Directorates; entities within the University of Malta and other further and higher education institutions; political parties; constituted bodies and civil society.

As part of the consultation process with students, **four mini videos were** produced and made available on You Tube, explaining the NCF proposals in the early years, in primary, in secondary and in science. These videos registered over 5,000 hits. Many of them were in the form of class viewership, meaning that the actual number of viewers was many times higher.

The following document were prepared to introduce the National Curriculum Framework to parents: The proposed *National Curriculum Framework 2011: Your Children's Future Education. A Guide for Parents*

The National Curriculum Framework Consultation Documents were all uploaded on www.meef.gov.mt for easy access.

C. School Staff Questionnaire

The response rate from the questionnaire for school staff was as follows:

Table 3: Response rate of Teaching Staff by Grade			
Grade	Number of returned scripts by Grade	Total staff by Grade (Nov 2011)	Response Rate (by Grade)
Head of School	79	143	55.24%
Assistant Head of School	152	355	42.82%
Head of Department & INCOs	46	119	40.35%
Teacher	1882	4462	42.18%
Kindergarten Assistant	308	613	50.24%
Learning Support Assistant	931	1951	47.72%
Grade not indicated	274		
Total	3672	7643	48.04%

The response rate from state schools was 54%, whilst the response rate for non-state schools was 35%. The response rate for primary schools in general was 66%, whilst that for secondary schools in general was 34.68%. This is within expected parameters and allows for the generalization of results.

The main results of the questionnaire were:

- 95% of respondents agreed with the principles of the NCF;
- 91% of respondents agreed that the three Aims of the NCF are relevant and comprehensive;
- 89% agreed with the inter-curricular themes of the NCF;
- 86% of respondents in the primary and 75% of respondents in the secondary agree with the Learning Areas;

Some of the main comments were the following:

- A policy on the language of instruction needs to be determined, at school or College level.
- Subject specialisation by the LSAs would be of benefit for the class teacher. Such LSAs would be more knowledgeable about the subject, and would be able to discuss difficulties and different strategies with the teachers as well as difficulties experienced by particular students.
- Allocating time for SDPs and meetings with teachers is a good way of enhancing collaboration between professional staff.
- A timetable based on a six-day week confuses both teachers and students.
- Three weekly lessons for foreign languages are not sufficient.
- More time should be allocated for PE.
- Parents should have better access to information and support from schools regarding the curriculum.
- Parents could assist during educational outings and extra-curricular activities.
- There should be more incentives to attract parents during school hours.

D. Students' Questionnaires

Below are some of the main replies from students' questionnaires:

Primary:

- 85.24% agree that teaching should be conducted according to students' competences and the way they learn best.
- 93% agree that they should learn how to use computers, internet and new technology efficiently in order for them to enjoy learning thus increasing their learning abilities.
- 53.54% agree that breaks are prolonged in order for them to have more time to rest, practice sports and involve themselves in other activities.

Secondary:

- 72.33% agree that teaching should be performed according to students' competences in each particular subject.
- 89.03% agree that they should learn how to use computers, internet and new technology efficiently in order for them to enjoy learning thus increasing their learning capabilities.
- 57.42% agree that breaks are prolonged so that they practice sports and involve themselves in other activities.
- 93.06% agree they should understand, speak, read and write well in Maltese as well as in English
- 56.06% are in favour of the introduction of Core Science as a Science subject which leads to a SEC examination.

E. The Children's Conference

Below is some of the main feedback from the Children's Conference:

- The amount of homework for the same week should be reduced.
- There should be more collaboration between students and teachers.
- There should be more use of computers.
- Students should have more possibilities to work in a team.
- There should be more oral work in schools.
- Social Studies as currently taught at school is not interactive at all. We are not allotted time to think, reason and express our views.
- Fieldwork is important since we use our senses, discuss and reason on the spot, thus making it easier for us to remember further.
- It is important to be active such as by helping in children and old people's home, getting involved in recycling, reducing air pollution and being kind to refugees.

- We are all in favour of art, singing, dancing, music and drama at school. We do not consider these subjects a waste of time. All schools should offer similar opportunities in this sector.
- All students should have the possibility to express their creativity irrespective of whether they choose Art as one of their option subjects or not.

F. Meetings with Parents

Below is some of the main feedback from the meetings with parents:

- A substantial number of parents stressed the importance of Continuous Professional Development for teachers.
- There was a wish for more extra-curricular activities at school.
- Schools should organise more meetings to guide parents in helping their children in different subjects.
- Parents agreed with the NCF idea of transition meetings between one level and the next.
- Parents expressed their wish for more meetings to be held in the evening.
- Parents asked whether the new curriculum will provide guidelines regarding the amount of homework given to students.

G. The Science Conference

Below is some of the main feedback from the Science Conference:

- With the proposals being made students would have a broader understanding of science.
- The Vision for Science Education should be implemented with immediate effect.
- The document addresses the training need for teachers both at primary and secondary level.
- B.Ed (Hons) students are not given sufficient preparation during their pre-service training course while attending University.
- There should be more flexibility in the choice of the compulsory science subject from Form 3 onwards.
- It will not be easy for some teachers, who up to now have specialised in a single Science subjects to teach Core Science.
- The Vision for Science Education does not give details about the consequences brought by the reform in the post-secondary sector.

H. Processing of Feedback

The formal feedback received by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education is impressive - both with regard to the quality as well as the quantity of the responses received. In early December 2011, the Minister's Office together with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education established a team to analyse and interpret the feedback received from the consultation process.

The first stage of the consultation process was a segmentation of feedback from four different stakeholders: (i) Schools (State, Church and Independent); (ii) the Directorates within the Ministry for Education; (iii) the University of Malta and Post Secondary institutions; and (iv) Constituted Bodies and Civic Society.

The segmentation of each individual feedback received from each of the four different cohorts of stakeholders was on two tiers:

- (i) the first tier was a categorisation of feedback on the basis of key aspects presented in the draft NCF - matters that include Aims and Principles of the NCF; Teaching Capacity; Syllabus; Learning Areas; Subjects within Learning Areas etc.

- (ii) the second tier of the segmentation process was directed to determine whether the feedback categorised constituted a positive response to the draft; a negative response; articulation of an issue; a position statement and a recommendation.

This process was completed in March 2012. Prior to this, State Colleges, Church and Independent schools that provided feedback were requested to ensure that the outcome of the analysis process of the feedback they presented faithfully reflected their respective position. The analysis of the remaining feedback was carried out by an independent quality assurer.

The Ministry of Education and the DQSE are now in the process of completing the analysis of the feedback.

It is to be noted that generally, the feedback was positive with regard to the aims and principles presented in the NCF - a holistic learner-centred inquiry based education system based on principles of diversity, entitlement, assurance, teacher support and continuum of achievement.

Moreover, to a large degree, it is pertinent to underline that there is a very high degree of consistency with regard to the feedback and reactions presented across the four different groups of stakeholders. Thus, for example, there is general consensus expressed with regard to the following points:

- The successful implementation of a differentiated teaching and learning environment, requires improved teacher resource allocation; improved teacher to student ratio; less syllabus content; more flexibility with regard to a teacher's approach in the classroom environment.
- The successful implementation of the principles proposed in the NCF requires a continuum of provision with post secondary and higher education. This also impacts on the current MATSEC examinations as well as the curriculum at post-secondary education level.
- The timetables presented as examples for discussion in the draft NCF, particularly those with regard to the primary level of education, are too rigid and do not offer enough flexibility. They do not reflect the ethos promoted by the draft NCF that there should be more autonomy and flexibility.
- It is to be noted that during 2011-12 the new curriculum for Form 1 was piloted. This was intended to give stakeholders an understanding of the concrete implications of the implementation of the draft NCF. During the first term of this scholastic year an intensive consultation and review exercise was carried out by the DQSE to get teachers' feedback on this pilot curriculum. The general response was that whilst it was appreciated that the documentation and tools provided the opportunity for much more personalized learning, this was seen as too constricting and still too demanding in terms of content to be covered, especially if new more learner-centred pedagogies were to be used. This feedback has been taken on board and the Form 1 curriculum has now been extensively revised.

As expected, different views and positions are presented with regard to the approaches presented in the NCF, as well as on how to meet these aims and principles. There is a wide range of views, sometimes contrasting, on the relative importance to be given to different subjects and learning areas in the curriculum. One important point presented from the feedback of the main groups is that the NCF is to be supported by a realistic and well conceived implementation plan. The design of an implementation strategy is seen to be an integral part of the post-consultation NCF process.

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