



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

The Education (Levels of Progression for  
Key Stages 1,2 and 3) Order (Northern  
Ireland) 2012

24 October 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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The Education (Levels of Progression for Key Stages 1,2 and 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Michaela Boyle  
Mr Jonathan Craig  
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson  
Mr Chris Hazzard  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr Sean Rogers  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mrs Katrina Godfrey	Department of Education
Mr David Hughes	Department of Education
Mr Carl Savage	Department of Education

**The Chairperson:** There have been a number of meetings in which we have considered the Department's proposals to make this statutory rule. Last week, the Committee agreed that it would endeavour to bring its consideration of the SL1 to a close today. The Department is keen to make the rule as soon as possible so that it will come into operation in December 2012.

At last week's meeting, members asked for further information on the moderation sample size used to assess the levels of progression. Some members wanted smaller sample sizes for smaller class sizes. That information has been tabled for consideration. It was e-mailed to members yesterday. There are also a number of papers in members' packs, including the original SL1 letter and the draft of the proposed statutory rule.

I had discussions with the Minister yesterday evening and this morning. He has agreed that, in conjunction with reducing the cohort, he is happy for it to be included in the guide that will be published for the statutory rule that there will not be a requirement on primary schools to submit their work this year and that they will have another year before they are required to do so. That will mean that they will be moderating themselves.

This is helpful, in that one of the issues that I raised with the Minister, which was also raised by Committee members last week, is that of the overload of work for principals and teachers — not exclusively but particularly — in primary schools. This has been recognised. We will come to the other issue of computer adaptive testing later this morning. However, when I look at some of the

papers in the pack today, I worry because some in the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) seem to think that there is not an overload and that somehow this is all technical and down to other things. As constituency MLAs, we know that it has contributed to a huge amount of pressure and issues. In one sense, this element has to be segregated from the computer adaptive testing issue. However, there is a correlation. What the Minister has suggested is useful.

Katrina Godfrey will be here in a moment to talk about the computer-based assessment. Should we leave this matter and let the officials speak about it when they come in, rather than make our decision now? We will come back to the statutory rule after we have dealt with computer testing and after Katrina and the other officials have briefed the Committee.

**Mr Kinahan:** Chairperson, you focused on the overload for primary schools. Are we confident that post-primary schools are not also suffering from an overload too? Why did you focus on primary schools? There is overload everywhere.

**The Chairperson:** The reason why I raised the issue of the primary sector is the fact that it has 860-odd schools, which make up the greater percentage of the school population. I felt that if we at least made some progress on the implementation of this, it might help. The capacity in primary schools is considerably less than that in post-primary schools. However, that is not to underestimate the issues that remain in the post-primary sector.

Are members happy for us to park this temporarily and let Katrina speak to it when she comes in?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:** I ask the officials to come forward, please. Katrina, I welcome you back to the Committee. I thank you, David, Carl and Ruth for coming. Katrina, before we deal with the computer-based assessment, I will inform you that we have just been discussing the levels of progression. You will be aware that I have had conversations with the Minister yesterday evening and this morning. Will you clarify what the introduction of the Order will mean for primary schools? It will mean self-moderation for the first year as opposed to having to submit their papers, as per the current proposal.

**Mrs Katrina Godfrey (Department of Education):** Yes, Chair. The discussions that have taken place over the last few hours have been focused on whether it would be helpful if we were to bring in the Order but specify in the approved assessment document that the element of the legislative provision that relates to the moderation would kick in in year 1 for Key Stage 3 and in year 2 for primary schools, i.e. Key Stages 1 and 2.

There are a number of things that that does not affect. As is the case at the moment, at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils will still need to be assessed in communication and using mathematics. Teachers will still need to arrive at a decision as to the level that they feel pupils have achieved. That will still be reported to parents and to CCEA for it to be collated at system level. None of that will change.

As I understand it, the proposal, as of yesterday evening, is an agreement that, in the first year, we will allow primary schools to get used to reaching their own assessment decisions. Moderation will then kick in from year 2 after the primary schools have had that first year of operation opportunity. That is the position as we understand it, subject to the Committee's views on the workability of it from its perspective.

**The Chairperson:** The Deputy Chair raised the issue of the post-primary sector.

**Mr Kinahan:** I am concerned about the work overload. We are looking at helping primary schools, but I think that we should be looking at doing the same for post-primary schools.

**Mrs Godfrey:** The point that the Committee made about post-primary last week concerned the proximity of Key Stage 3 to GCSE. Given the Programme for Government targets around GCSE attainment, it was felt important that we go live with Key Stage 3 all the way in the first year but deal with the requirements for Key Stages 1 and 2 in a slightly different way. If I understand correctly, that

was a particular wish of the Committee, in discussion with the Minister, to respond to the particular scenario that applies in primary schools at the moment.

**The Chairperson:** Sean, do you want comment on the reduced cohort, because that is something that you raised?

Before that, it is not often that I am quick at picking up on things in papers, but I might have picked up on something. It states in the paper that we got this morning that this would mean, for example, that a school with only 10 pupils in year 4 or year 7 would "not" have to submit just six portfolios rather than 10.

**Mrs Godfrey:** It should read "now".

**The Chairperson:** That is OK.

**Mrs Godfrey:** Unfortunately, the spellchecker did not pick that one up.

**The Chairperson:** I get additional points for picking that up. That is probably the only thing that I have picked up this morning. That clarifies things. Sean, you wanted to make a point from the notes that I saw from last week.

**Mr Rogers:** Thanks for that. It is welcome news that primary schools will have a bit more time. A lot of our primary school teachers still think that the system was designed for Key Stage 3 but has been dumbed down to be used in primary schools. Obviously, this will allow for another year to get this worked out even better.

I have one or two other things that I want to highlight. In respect of the assessment being completed by March, a lot of teachers will probably do it in January or early February to get it over with, but, by the time the level is awarded, it will be June, which is six months later. This assessment is about assessment for learning, so there will be quite a gap between the assessment being carried out and the levels being awarded. That is one concern that I have.

Another concern is the transition from the old system to the new system. I want to flag up the issue of the old level of attainment at level 5, for example, and a new level of progression at level 4 and the consequences of that for school league tables. This is about assessing skills, but skills are not necessarily a pen and paper exercise, and you need quite a bit of time for it. I saw a bit of the promotional video, which shows a teacher working with a group of six children. I do not have to remind you that a full class of 30 is very different. However, I acknowledge the reduction in the sample size. and that primary schools will have a little more time.

**Mrs Godfrey:** Chair, would you like me to respond to a couple of those points?

**The Chairperson:** Yes, please.

**Mrs Godfrey:** The March timescale came about as a result of discussions with teachers. They were concerned that if it were put into May, with April quite often being the Easter holidays, you were end-loading a lot. They would not only have to complete the assessments, reach a decision on levels, carry out the internal moderation in the school to make sure that, where there was more than one class, things were happening consistently, and then to write up the reports and have those out to parents before the end of June. It was a response to the concerns of schools.

That is always one of the challenges in getting the balance right. That is a key point to make. The focus is that it is an opportunity to provide information, as we have said before, at a system level at just three key points in a child's 12 years of education. However, importantly, first and foremost, it is a system for making sure that children's progress is documented, recorded and communicated, including to their parents, because we know that that creates a better opportunity for parental involvement.

As far as the changes are concerned, you are absolutely right. The levels of progression, because they include the skills dimension, are actually more robust than the old levels of attainment, which predate the revised curriculum. That is why, specifically at departmental level, we have not set targets for 2013-14 and for 2012-13. We would not be measuring like with like. We would expect the same

for schools, and we would be communicating to schools the expectation that an old level of attainment is not the same as a new level of progression and that they will have to take that into account in their own target-setting because, with the skills dimension, these are actually more stretching, and so they should be. If we identify skills that pupils need, the focus should be on having the right system, not on making sure that the numbers go the same way as with the previous system.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you for that. I appreciate that, Katrina. I am happy now that we can make our decision on how we deal with that. I understand the Department's issue with timing. The past couple of weeks have been useful. The past 24 hours have also been useful. Thank you for that.

Members, we have heard all that we discussed in relation to the statutory rule and the changes proposed to the cohort and the moderation for Key Stages 1 and 3. It refers to primary schools only. In the light of this, are we happy to determine that the Committee is content to make the rule with those caveats and agreements that were discussed and communicated to us?

**Mr Kinahan:** How does that relate to what we have been discussing with respect to computer-based assessment?

**The Chairperson:** We need to be clear that we need to separate the two matters in our minds. Although they are related, they are two separate processes. The difficulty that we always have with these issues is that they can get convoluted, confused and mixed up because of our own understanding of them. Clearly, the computer-adaptive testing issue is separate from the levels of progression at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. However, they are part of the process that schools have to go through.

The problem that the Department has is that it introduced a revised curriculum in 2007 and is now coming, in 2012, to try to marry the revised curriculum to the levels of progression. That, clearly, was a major mistake. The two should have run concurrently. They had assessment in the old curriculum, which is basically what they were using until recently. Now, they want to bring those two things together. You can see some logic in that. However, the way in which they have gone about it is yet another example of how poorly these things are handled.

**Mr Rogers:** How can we ensure, as a Committee, that we have a scrutiny role in how the level of progression works out at Key Stage 3?

**The Chairperson:** If we progress this SL1 today in the light of the assurances that we have been given, we will need that to be communicated to us. We will need to look again at levels of progression at Key Stage 3. We will need to build that into our work programme and say that we will look at it in February or March. Would you be happy with that?

**Mr Rogers:** Yes.

**The Committee Clerk:** The ideal time would probably be in the summer term, because I think that the assessing is done in March. We could look at it after Easter because we would have some numbers then?

**The Chairperson:** Yes. I will put formally to the Committee to determine that members are content for the Department to make the statutory rule.

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:** Thank you.