

## Careers Education in Schools in Northern Ireland

A paper for the NICEC comparative study of careers education in schools in the UK and the Republic of Ireland

Deirdre Gillespie

Secretary of Northern Ireland Schools Careers Association (NISCA),  
Member of Northern Ireland Careers Education Review Group  
Senior Teacher with responsibility for Careers Education and Guidance

### Introduction

This short paper has been written for the NICEC comparative study of careers education in the UK and Ireland. It outlines the development and current provision of careers education and guidance (CEG) in Northern Ireland schools. It is hoped that the findings of the project will be shared with all stakeholders involved in developing CEG in Northern Ireland schools, and that any recommendations that emerge will help to focus further support for careers education, to promote the best practice in schools.

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) has overall responsibility for education in Northern Ireland but it delegates responsibility to five regional Education and Library Boards (ELB). Currently, Northern Ireland has a selective post-primary system where pupils' post-primary school destinations are based on their performance in the transfer test. There are two types of post-primary school in Northern Ireland, Grammar and Secondary, and these schools are further sub-divided into controlled, maintained, integrated and voluntary. All schools receive funding from the Department of Education.

Northern Ireland has seen rapid changes and developments in education, training and employment in recent years. The demand for improvements in the level, nature, relevance and variety of qualifications, together with changes in patterns of work as a result of technological development and organisational restructuring, have had major implications for education. The 1995 Department of Education publication *Better Choices – Putting Principles into Practice*, states that schools face a major challenge in deciding how best they can help young people to prepare for 'a route through life that will cover a wide range of territory and involve many cross-roads and decisions'. Rafts of government initiatives were implemented to ensure that educational structures would support the development of a competitive, innovative, dynamic and knowledge based economy. The most significant of these came as a result of the implementation of the 1989 Educational Reform (NI) Order. It recognised the major role to be played by careers education and guidance in this changing environment and stated that all schools were required to deliver careers education as part of the compulsory curriculum for all pupils from ages 11-16.

### Recent developments in CEG within the Northern Ireland curriculum

The Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced on a phased basis from 1990. It was reviewed in 1994 and the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced from September 1996. The curriculum is defined in terms of four key stages, which cover the 12 years of compulsory schooling.

- Key Stage 1, covers school years 1-4 for pupils aged 4-8;
- Key Stage 2, covers school years 5-7 for pupils aged 9-11;
- Key Stage 3, covers school years 8-10 for pupils aged 12-14;
- Key Stage 4, covers school years 11-12 for pupils aged 15-16.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum is divided into six areas of study, which are supported by six educational or cross-curricular themes. The intention is that these educational themes, of which careers education is one, are not seen as separate subjects but should be woven through the main subjects of the curriculum.

The prescribed Northern Ireland post-primary curricular requirements for Key Stages 3 and 4 are as follows:

Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Religious Education	Religious Education
<b>English</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>
<b>Science &amp; Technology</b>	<b>Science &amp; Technology</b>
(Science & Technology & Design)	(Science)
<b>Environment &amp; Society</b> (History and Geography)	<b>Environment &amp; Society</b> (A course in one of History, Geography, Business Studies, Home Economics, Economics, Politics or an appropriate modular provision)
<b>Creative &amp; Expressive</b> (Art and Design, Music and PE)	<b>Creative &amp; Expressive</b> (Physical Education)
<b>Modern Language</b> French or German or Italian or Spanish or Irish	<b>Modern Language</b> (An approved course in a modern language)
<b>Six educational themes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education for Mutual Understanding</li> <li>• Cultural Heritage</li> <li>• Health Education</li> <li>• Information Technology</li> <li>• Economic Awareness</li> <li>• Careers Education</li> </ul>	<b>Six educational themes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education for Mutual Understanding</li> <li>• Cultural Heritage</li> <li>• Health Education</li> <li>• Information Technology</li> <li>• Economic Awareness</li> <li>• Careers Education</li> </ul>

The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (NICC) *Cross-curricular themes – Consultation Report* (1989), indicated that all teachers of Key Stage 3 & 4 had a shared responsibility for developing and delivering careers education within their academic subject. It recommended that 'appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding relating to careers education should be incorporated into programmes of study and attainment targets for compulsory subjects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum'. However it became clear that while careers education was included within subject programmes of study the delivery of careers education was not taking place. It was accepted by that subject teachers lacked the expertise of the careers teacher and that improved resources and trained personnel were required.

In 1995, *A review of Careers Guidance – Improving Quality*, undertaken by the DENI and the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA), was published. It recommended that:

'The Education and Training Inspectorate should publish indicators of quality of careers education and guidance to inform the self-evaluation undertaken by the schools, colleges and training organisations.'

*Review of Careers Guidance – Improving Quality*, DENI (1995).

This document recommended that the responsibility for the provision of careers guidance should rest with the school and suggested that policy statements should be developed

which specify pupil entitlement. It emphasised the importance of personal careers planning (PCP) and focused on the 'partnership' between the school/college and the T&EA. It recommended that a 'service level agreement' between the two parties be established.

In 1996, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), published *Evaluating a Careers Programme*, which was in response to the 1995 review body's recommendations. The main aim of the document was to help those involved in the management, teaching and support of careers programmes improve their current practice and, through the process of self-evaluation, gain improvement. The report made several recommendations. Firstly, it was recognised that cross-curricular careers experiences in other subjects made a valuable contribution to careers education. However, it stated that both timetabled careers lessons and a cross-curricular approach were necessary for a comprehensive careers programme. The report provided benchmarks against which schools could evaluate the quality of CEG programmes. It recommended a careers education and guidance framework consisting of six core components and highlighted the management and organisational arrangements for an effective careers programme. It can be argued that this document contextualised careers education and guidance in Northern Ireland; although it was not within the traditional framework of a Programme of Study.

Also in response to the 1995 review, the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (NICCEA) published, in 1996, *Careers Planning for the Future*. This document helped schools in the development of CEG policy statements and provided guidance for the introduction of PCP. The publication highlighted performance indicators to assist schools and colleges in measuring the learning outcomes, which might be expected from students in relation to the aims and objectives of the careers programme.

In 1996 the T&EA published a report entitled *Service Level Agreements – Partnerships in Practice*. This report outlined a framework for the development of stronger partnerships between schools and the T&EA. It highlighted that schools' and T&EA's careers work should be complementary and argued that collective responsibility and joint planning/delivery would bring coherence to the careers programme. The Service Level Agreement was introduced in 1996. However, it can be argued that in some cases it was little more than a paper exercise.

In 1999 NICCEA published *Key Messages from the Curriculum 21 Conferences*. It highlighted the need for employers to demonstrate a range of key skills and emphasised the importance of PCP in the process of lifelong learning. It highlighted the need for workers to acquire both knowledge and skills as they move through adult life in order to help them prepare for the increased globalisation of the workplace. The importance of these skills was recently

highlighted in *The Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey 2000*, published by The Department of Higher and Further Education, Training & Employment in January 2001. It accepted that generally pupils were obtaining good educational qualifications but 'many young people lacked the skills required in the work place and were not adequately prepared for the world of work.'

In March 1999, The Northern Ireland Economic Development Strategy Review Steering Group published the *Strategy 2010* document. It recommended that the current system of CEG should be enhanced and that a public sector body could possibly offer enhanced careers guidance. It recommended that Business Education Partnerships be developed and that Initial Teacher Training should include an industrial placement.

It is evident that from the above review that there have been significant developments in the nature of CEG in Northern Ireland schools. In December 2000 ETI published a *Report of a Survey of Careers Education in Post-Primary Schools*, which suggested that further refinements were necessary. The key issues identified included the need for a taught programme of CEG and the better co-ordination of careers as an educational theme. It again highlighted the need for the development of PCP and emphasised the need for skills development, the need for recognised training and the use of ICT resources.

Between January and December 2000 the Careers Review Group carried out a review of CEG in schools and colleges. A report of their findings is not yet available. However it is hoped that the working group will address issues to ensure that each pupil has access to a high quality careers education and guidance programme.

### Careers education curriculum practice

One of the major weaknesses of careers provision in Northern Ireland is the lack of a specific programme of study. The *Evaluating a Careers Programme*, published by the DENI in 1996, was produced to assist school in the monitoring and evaluation of its careers provision. It identified six core components, which should be present in a schools programme. The current curriculum practice in each of these areas is as follows:

- **Timetabled lessons**

Most schools provide timetabled careers lessons between years 10–14; however very few schools provide any careers education in years 8 and 9. The extent and content of the lessons vary, with many programmes delivered on a modular basis through personal and social education (PSE) programmes. In general, year 10 focuses on GCSE subject choice, years 11 and 12 on decision-making, careers opportunities and work experience while years 13 and 14 concentrate on higher/further education application.

- **Cross-curricular provision**

As stated earlier, careers education is one of the six cross-curricular themes of the Northern Ireland statutory curriculum. It was intended that this theme should be integrated within all subjects of the curriculum. There is clear evidence that careers education as a cross-curricular/educational theme is poorly developed.

- **Careers guidance for individuals**

The extent of careers guidance interviews in schools varies. Some schools interview pupils at each decision making stage, others interview all year 12 pupils, while some school's focus on those who are in need of greater support.

- **Careers information**

The access to high quality, up-to-date careers information varies from school to school and depends on the resources available to the careers co-ordinator.

- **Experiences of work**

Experiences of work can take a variety of forms, with the most common form being a period of placement with an employer during Key Stage 4. In some schools, particularly grammar schools, work shadowing is offered to pupils during their post-16 education. Whilst it is accepted that this aspect of careers education is one of the most significant and beneficial for pupils, the quality of placement varies. Much work has been done to address this problem in recent years which has resulted in stronger business/education links and the development of Business Education Partnerships. NICCEA and The Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership (NIBEP) have developed quality standards for employers and schools along with teaching materials and student logbooks.

- **Personal career planning (PCP)**

NICCEA, in their document entitled *Careers Planning for the Future*, define personal career planning (PCP) as 'a process which enables young people to make informed decisions and choices in relation to career development, and to act on those decisions'. The document goes on to say that careers programmes should be planned and implemented so that the students' decision-making skills are developed. The ETI survey of careers education, December 2000, states that 'pupils where the PCP process is well developed acquire useful skills in researching and evaluating careers information'. However, the report goes on to say that 'in the majority of schools, the PCP process is not given sufficient emphasis in helping pupils to refine progressively the decisions which they make about options open to them when leaving school'.

The *Evaluating a Careers Programme*, published in 1996 by DENI, states that all six core components are necessary for an effective careers programme.

## T&EA Careers Service

Careers officers are employed by the T&EA and must, in order to practice, hold either the post-graduate Diploma in Careers Guidance or the NVQ level 4 in Guidance. Their primary role is to provide impartial guidance to young people in schools, colleges, training organisations and to the young unemployed. The careers officer's work in schools and colleges is formalised through service level agreements. However the level of support from the careers service has declined due to a lack of resources, with many officers only able to support year 12 pupils.

## Inspection and quality assurance

ETI are responsible for carrying out all school inspections and therefore evaluation of careers work.

In the Review of Careers Guidance, undertaken in 1995, the review group made two specific recommendations relating to the ETI. Firstly, it recommended that ETI should publish quality indicators and, secondly, it should carry out periodic surveys of CEG in order to aid quality assurance. In 1996 DENI published *Evaluating a Careers Programme*. This document has been used by both schools and the careers advisers in each of the ELBs to promote good practice, and by the Inspectorate in evaluating careers programmes. Since 1995 the ETI has undertaken a number of inspections and surveys in careers education, with the most recent report published in December 2000 on a survey of careers education in post-primary schools.

## Careers teachers and their professional development

In Northern Ireland a teacher does not train to become a careers teacher. There is no provision within the Initial Teacher Training programme for CEG. Careers teachers are teachers of other subjects who become involved in careers education through interest, appointment or requirement. Most schools would have a careers co-ordinator with a reduced teaching timetable. However, there are a few Northern Ireland schools which have a full time dedicated careers co-ordinator.

In its survey of Careers Education in Post-Primary Schools (December 2000), the ETI highlighted that 'in about one-third of the schools, the staff involved do not have specialist qualification in careers education'.

Each ELB has a CEG adviser who provides in-school support and organises a range of short courses each year for careers teachers. The two Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland provide careers education qualifications. Queen University Belfast (QUB) provides the opportunity for teachers to complete a certificate in Careers Education and Guidance, while the University of Ulster (UU) provides a framework which allows teachers to obtain a Certificate, Diploma or Masters degree in CEG. It is accepted that in



order for careers education to be developed a major initiative on training is essential.

### **Professional association for careers educators**

The professional association for careers teachers is the Northern Ireland Careers Association (NISCA). NISCA has 146 post-primary school/institution members and has been in existence for approximately 20 years. The subscription for school membership is £20 per year.

NISCA is run by an Executive Council of 13 members. All executive members work for NISCA on a voluntary basis. The executive meets 10 times per year. NISCA produces and distributes regular newsletters and is currently developing a strategy for more effective communication to its members. The main work of NISCA is the organisation of its annual conference in November. This two-day conference focuses on issues which are of concern to its members. It attracts approximately 120 delegates each year. In recent years there has been an emphasis on ICT and employability.

The association lobbies government and agencies on behalf of its members and in recent years has had representation on the Careers Review Group. NISCA also has representatives on the Northern Ireland UCAS Standing Group. The organisation has developed close links with other careers teachers' associations and regularly sends delegates to careers-related conferences in the British Isles.

### **The future**

The provision of CEG in Northern Ireland is likely to undergo further development as a result of the NICCEA Curriculum Review at Key Stages 1-4, and the Northern Ireland Post Primary Review.

- **NICCEA curriculum review**

NICCEA have proposed several curriculum changes at Key Stage 1-4 which could impact upon CEG. One important recommendation, which will have an impact on the delivery of careers education in schools, is the introduction of a programme of Education for Employability as part of a Personal Development Programme. Education for Employability would cover work in the global economy, career management and skills and qualities for work and would provide a strong basis for lifelong learning in a rapidly changing employment market. It is suggested that Personal Development should occupy approximately 10% of curriculum time.

- **Post-primary review**

The Government established the Northern Ireland Post Primary Review to consult and bring forward recommendations for the future organisation of post-primary education in Northern Ireland. Their report in October 2001 highlighted three proposals:

- The development of a pupil profile to provide information to parents, pupils and teachers
- The abolition of the eleven plus transfer test and the end of academic selection
- The creation of local collaborative networks of schools in a system of collegiates.

The review body accepts that CEG has a central role in helping pupils reach their full potential and that it is an important link between education, training, employers and the economy. They highlight that CEG will become a more important element of the school experience as Curriculum 2000 and the National Framework of Qualifications are implemented. The changes in the world of work, in the structures of business and industry, in the patterns of work, and the availability of a range of qualifications, demand a more effective and up-to-date CEG system. The review body believes that the collegiate structure offers significant opportunities for improving CEG in schools. Each collegiate would have a large body of staff with wide and varied experience. They believe that there would be opportunities for the sharing of resources and they would provide a strong basis for enhancing the status, effectiveness and efficiency of CEG in schools.

## References

- Department for Education and Employment. (1995). *Better Choices - Putting Principles into Practice*. London: DfEE.
- Department of Education Northern Ireland. (1995). *Review of Careers Guidance - Improving Quality*. DENI.
- Department of Education Northern Ireland. (1996). *Evaluating a Careers Programme - Improving Quality*. DENI.
- Department of Education. *Post-Primary Review Report*. (2001). DE.
- Education & Training Inspectorate. (2000). *Report of a Survey of Careers Education in Post-Primary Schools*. DE.
- Edward, E. and Barnes, A. (1997). *Effective Careers Education and Guidance*. Stafford: Network Educational Press.
- HMSO. (1989), *Education Reform Act*. London: DfEE.
- Northern Ireland Curriculum Council. (1989). *Cross-Curricular Themes - Consultation Report*. NICC.
- Northern Ireland Curriculum Council. (1996). *Key Messages from the Curriculum 21 Conferences*, NICCEA.
- Northern Ireland Curriculum Council. (1999). *Careers Planning for the Future*. NICCEA.
- Northern Ireland Economic Development, Strategy Review Steering Group. (1999). *Strategy 2010*. DHFETE.
- The Skills Unit, Research & Evaluation Branch. (2001). *The Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey 2000*. DFHETE.
- Training & Employment Agency. (1996). *Service Level Agreements - Partnerships in Practice*. Training & Employment Agency.