

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Report of meeting between committee members and officials of the Department of Education held on October 24th 1995 at the Department of Education, Marlborough St.

Present;

For the Dept. of Education; Tom Boland, Betty Rock
For the NCCA; Albert O Ceallaigh, Anne Looney
For the committee; Pat Murray, Kenneth Milne, Gerry Farrell, Anne Walsh, Dermot Lane.

Background

The meeting was held at the request of the committee which was particularly anxious to hear the Department's response to the rationale document which had been submitted in April, such a response being a matter of some urgency in the light of the impending circulation of draft syllabuses for consultation purposes. While the support of the Minister and the Department of Education was welcomed, concern had been expressed by members of the committee who had been involved in the preparation of the 1982 syllabus that current efforts would meet a similar fate if the legislative and constitutional issues were not urgently addressed.

Department of Education Policy

Tom Boland stated that the delay in response to the rationale document was due to the ongoing case in the High Court concerning the payment of chaplains in Community Schools. The outcome of this case could have implications for the work of the committee, although the work of the committee was not dependant upon it. Judgement in this is due before Christmas.

A document concerning any constitutional difficulties which might arise in the provision of syllabuses for Religious Education has been sent by the Department to the Attorney Generals office. While such difficulties are not expected, the matter must be clarified.

The committee stated that the provision of Religious Education syllabuses was on sound educational grounds which would further avoid any such difficulties.

The Junior Certificate

Betty Rock emphasised that it was the policy of the Minister and the Department of Education to provide syllabuses in Religious Education for national assessment and certification. She raised the following queries re Junior Certificate however;

- Given that the previous initiative had been at Leaving certificate level, where had the impetus for Junior Certificate originated?
- It would seem that more students would take this subject than would take Leaving Certificate. But the outline presented with the rationale document of the sections of the Junior Certificate course seemed to be very 'faith' oriented.

Responding to this, Albert O Ceallaigh pointed out that it was the remit of the NCCA to make syllabuses available for junior and senior cycles.

Members of the committee pointed out that Religious Education suited the philosophy of the Junior Certificate and that if assessment was to be introduced then it should be introduced for both Junior and Leaving certificates. They also indicated that both syllabuses were still at draft stage and that the departments concerns about the Junior Certificate would be taken on board.

Why Assessment and Certification?

Tom Boland wondered why assessment and certification was necessary. Could syllabuses be provided without offering examination?

The committee pointed out that the assessment is in fact an integral part of the education process, both as a measure of the students own achievement and as an evaluation of the effectiveness of the syllabus.

General Support.

At the meeting Sr. Pat Murray emphasised that in the consultation process the committee and the NCCA had encountered a general welcome for the initiative and expectation that syllabuses would be delivered. Gerry Farrell stated that it was supported by the National Parents Council who were anxious that the work proceeded.

Circulation of the Syllabuses for Consultation.

The advice of the Department of Education was to defer the circulation of these drafts until the Attorney General had responded to the Departments submission. This response is expected in December. The committee and the NCCA agreed that such a deferral was appropriate.