

INTO Submission to the CCEA Review of Qualifications May 2013

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the largest teaching union in Ireland and presently represents around 7,000 teachers in all educational sectors in Northern Ireland. INTO has already responded to the consultation on proposed short term changes to A levels and now welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the overall review of qualifications here.

14-16 Qualifications

INTO has already made it clear and continues to hold the view that the Organisation rejects completely the option to follow the policy direction which has been adopted in England.

As stated in the Organisation's previous submission on potential short term changes to A levels, INTO strongly believes in principle that schools and students should have a choice of modular or linear courses, which would offer the best chance of attainment for a broader range of pupils.

A return to linear-only examinations would inevitably lead to further narrowing of the curriculum and even more of teaching to the test.

INTO would lend conditional support to the option of retaining GCSEs, with amendments to reflect the needs of Northern Ireland educational policies and the Northern Ireland economy.

INTO would agree that subject content would need, where appropriate, to be revised, to reflect the needs of Northern Ireland but would not go as far as to agree that GCSEs should be aligned to the principles of the Entitlement Framework.

INTO does not subscribe to the view that assessment of Cross Curricular Skills should be included in any modified GCSEs here. The Organisation believes that there has been, and continues to be, an over-emphasis on the 'cross-curricularity' of these skills. INTO's view is that each subject should be assessed on the skills and knowledge inherent to the subject, without the need to refer to explicit skills, developed elsewhere. There exists a natural exchange of core skills such as use of ICT, managing information, numeracy, communication etc across subject areas and it is implicit in success at GCSE that pupils can manage these skills.

On the question of the inclusion of Other skills, INTO holds the same views as those expressed in the previous paragraph.

On the question of modular/linear assessment or a combination of both, the INTO view has not changed. Flexibility is the key. Research has shown that modular examinations are no 'easier' than linear ones and are no less rigorous. The same applies to the question of internal assessment versus external assessment. There are subjects which naturally lend themselves to an emphasis on either internal or external assessment. It is also important that schools have the flexibility to opt for a method of assessment which is best suited to the needs of its pupils.

INTO believes that it is possible for Northern Ireland to develop its own set of qualifications at both GCSE and A level. It is essential to note however, the point that INTO made in its submission on the proposed short term changes to A levels, that;

INTO is strongly of the view that comparability of examination results here with those England and Wales is vital. Pupils from the North must have equality of accessibility to universities across these islands. It is equally vital that comparability with the Republic of Ireland is established and maintained. There have already been issues with BTEC qualifications being acceptable for university entrance in England, but not in Dublin. INTO would want to see full portability of qualifications within and across the islands.

INTO believes that any new qualifications here should reflect the needs of our pupils, within a local and a global context.

INTO does not subscribe to the view that a core set of subjects/skills, which would have to be undertaken by all pupils, should be identified. The Organisation believes that the individual needs and aptitudes of students should be catered for. The vision of education as no more than an economic driver seems to underpin the idea of 'core' subjects. Whilst Education is indeed partly an economic driver, there has been a drive of late to persuade people to take up STEM subjects, with a view to building a workforce with those particular skills. As a society, we need to be more imaginative and build an economy around the skills sets we already have or that our pupils are inclined towards. The Arts have the potential to be economically productive but are being squeezed (they represent 10% of UK GDP and employ 2.5 Million people). Pupils, in the first instance, need to be treated as individuals and their personal ambitions must be catered for.

INTO does not believe that the number of subjects assessed at age 16 should be reduced nor that external assessment should be limited to core subjects.

INTO does not feel that there is a need to establish clear distinction between achievement at Level 1 and Level 2, as the Organisation believes that such distinction will occur naturally. INTO does subscribe to the view that there should be overlap, so

that L1 students, who develop later or show more promise than expected, can be given recognition for their achievement.

INTO's views on Cross-Curricular Skills, Other Skills, modularity/linearity and internal/external assessment have already been outlined above.

Keeping in mind the Organisation's views as outlined above, INTO would support the proposal to remove the emphasis on high stakes examinations at age 16.

16-18 Qualifications

INTO's views on the proposed short term changes to A levels, as contained within the Organisation's submission to the consultation thereon, reflect very much its views on the options proposed in the review of 16-18 qualifications. The Organisation's views on linearity/modularity remain as expressed.

INTO rejects completely the proposal to follow the policy adopted in England.

INTO is strongly of the view that AS levels should be retained as they currently stand. As stated in the earlier consultation, INTO believes that AS levels enable students to measure their success and to gauge future potential. AS levels were introduced to foster broader learning and have been successful in doing so. They are of particular benefit to students who mature at a slightly later date.

INTO does not see anything to be gained by, and would need to see the justification for, changing the balance of assessment to 40:60.

INTO's views on retaining A levels, with amendments to reflect the needs of pupils and the economy in Northern Ireland, together with its views on developing new 16-18 qualifications are the same as the Organisation holds for GCSEs, outlined above. In addition, INTO would reiterate its core policy that qualifications attained here must be comparable with those gained elsewhere and portable for access to universities, across these islands.

Gerry Murphy
Northern Secretary