Northern Ireland Schools; Curriculum, governance and policy

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7.4 Secondary schools in Northern Ireland: governance, policy and curriculum

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Introduction

This unit provides an overview of education in the context of Northern Ireland (NI) and addresses key issues that make schooling in NI different from elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK). The unit begins by focusing on the distinctive nature of education in NI, followed by a detailed description of the structure and governance of education, where key legislation and policies are discussed. This unit also addresses the structure of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (RNIC) and highlights advancements in terms of curriculum interpretation and implementation since its introduction in 2007. The unit then focuses on the teaching profession in NI where the structure of initial teacher education (ITE) is addressed, as well as Induction and Early Professional Development (EPD). Finally, the unit deals with the future of education in NI, which at the time of writing faces many uncertainties, particularly in relation to the structure of ITE and the continuing debate over the academic selection of pupils at the age of 11 years. Throughout this unit, there are set tasks that are designed to encourage you to reflect and critique your progress during ITE and beyond. The completion of these tasks will allow you to maximise the learning to be gained from engaging with this unit.

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the distinctive features of the structure and governance in Northern Irish schools;
- describe the structure of the NI school curriculum; and
- have a clear understanding of the standards for ITE and the expectations and demands of Induction and EPD.

Check the requirements of your ITE programme to see which relate to this unit.

The 'distinctive' nature of Northern Ireland education

Education in Northern Ireland differs from systems used elsewhere in the UK. It could be argued that most NI schools are divided by religion, academic ability and gender. The history of NI has been dominated by repeated attempts to manage the 'troubled' relationship between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority (Gallagher 2007), which resulted in the emergence of a parallel school system. The development of this parallel school system dates back as far as the 1920s when the island of Ireland was partitioned. Failure of the churches to agree to pursue a largely secular form of education meant that a segregated education system emerged, with Protestants attending state-funded schools and most Catholics attending voluntary schools that received partial government funding. Catholic schools now receive 100 per cent funding, but in the past these schools were receiving as little as 60 per cent, often forcing them to offer only the cheaper (arts) subjects, science being too expensive. However, in 1981, the first integrated school opened, and currently there are approximately 60 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, although it must be highlighted that the majority of these are primary schools. Pupils attending integrated schools make up approximately 7 per cent of the school population. The churches have been unwilling to become involved in the development of integrated schools, and the schools have therefore been established by the voluntary efforts of parents. In 1989, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order placed a duty on the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) 'to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education'. Pupils are taught most subjects through the medium of Irish, which is the second language of most of the pupils, while English is taught through English. This form of education has been described as Immersion Education, and is now firmly established as a successful and effective form of bilingual education.

In 2008, the then Education Minister Catriona Ruane abolished the 11+ transfer test, insisting that continued selection at 11 was unfair and that a move to a comprehensive secondary school system was required. Fast forward to 2015 and academic selection still exists. DENI did abolish the assessment structure, but the majority of grammar (selective) schools wanted academic selection to remain, so they continue to test pupils at age 11 through their own means. Of the 68 grammar schools in NI, 29 are Catholic and 39 are Protestant. Of the 29 Catholic, seven have decided to phase out academic selection, while none of the Protestant grammars have yet to consider such a move. It is inevitable that other Catholic grammar schools will follow suit and it seems that more and more Catholic grammars are falling in line with the Church's and the Education Minister's views.

The total number of post-primary schools in 2014/15 is 208. One-third (68) of post-primary schools are grammars and the remaining two-thirds (140) are non-grammars (non-selective). The total number of schools has fallen from 217 in 2010, accounted for by a drop in the number of non-grammar schools. The number of pupils in post-primary schools is 142,553, and this has dropped by more than 5,000 pupils in the last four years. Given the declining overall post-primary enrolment, a greater proportion of pupils are attending grammar schools than before (44 per cent in 2014/15 compared to 41.1 per cent in 2005/06) (DENI 2015). The impact of this is that fewer pupils are attending non-selective schools, meaning that many secondary schools with declining numbers receive less funding from DENI, since school funding is based on pupil numbers and age (post-16 pupils receive greater funding than pupils in years 8–12 and since many secondary schools have no sixth form provision they are at a disadvantage when it comes to school budgeting).

At the time of writing, the Equality Commission produced a draft paper entitled 'Key Inequalities in Education' (2015). The findings from this report highlight that while the majority of pupils benefit

from our education system, there are many who significantly underachieve. Some of the key findings are:

- Although there have been overall increases in the level of attainment for all pupils, males have persistently lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing right through to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advance (A) Level.
- Protestants persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSE English and Maths, and A Level.
- Furthermore, between 2007/08 and 2011/12, the gap between Catholic and Protestant attainment has widened; therefore, this is not only a persistent, but an increased, inequality.
- When we look at the educational attainment of males and females from different community backgrounds in respect to their socio-economic status, there is persistent underachievement and lack of progression of working class Protestants, particularly males.

The newly appointed NI children's commissioner, Koulla Yiasouma, has called for an end to academic selection, highlighting the current testing situation as working against children's human rights and maintaining the gap between rich and poor. She welcomed efforts to integrate children currently separated by religion, but said our society needs a new debate on how to tackle social divisions to allow all children to fulfil their potential. The commissioner referred to a report by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2008, which told NI that they had to stop academic selection, emphasising that their approach was unfair and discriminatory.

Northern Ireland schools

The education system in NI consists of several different types of grant-aided schools: controlled, voluntary and grant maintained integrated. Each school type has an arrangement for control and management.

Controlled schools

From a total of approximately 1,200 schools, the recently established Education Authority for Northern Ireland (EANI) has funding authority for approximately 900. This figure includes the 500 schools for which EANI has managing authority of its own *controlled* schools, exercised through the implementation of boards of governors.

Controlled schools are non-denominational and comprise nursery, primary and post-primary schools, including a range of Special Schools to provide education for pupils with special needs. Post-primary controlled schools continue to operate under the cloud of academic selection, branding pupils as academically or vocationally oriented from the age of 11 with little facility for late developers to transfer across the divide. The grammar schools are populated mostly by children of the middle classes who typically instil the values of education in their children from an early age. Moreover, they understand and articulate well the arguments for segregation, protecting the established power base in society and government. The resulting inequality of provision between some secondary and grammar schools is shamefully ignored and perpetuated by formula funding that favours the grammar sector.

Voluntary schools

471 schools are categorised as *voluntary maintained schools* and managed by boards of governors nominated by trustees – mainly Roman Catholic – along with parents, teachers and EANI representatives. The employing authority of teachers in these schools is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), while the funding authority resides with EANI.

Regarding CCMS' stance on academic selection:

> The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has a clear and unequivocal policy to secure the end of academic selection at the age of 11 and move towards an inclusive system of post-primary education where the differential learning aspirations and needs of each child are appropriately catered for. The Council believes that the continued existence of selection alongside 'Open Enrolment' has created a multi-tiered system of schools differentiated on a social class basis which has in time led to the emergence of both unviable and 'sink' schools. Such a situation can no longer be tolerated.
>
> (CCMS 2009)

The transition for Catholic grammar schools towards a comprehensive model, subsequently relinquishing their privileged status, has been far from painless. Some of these schools are located in deprived areas of the province, and a change of admission policy to something based on geographical catchment would dramatically change their clientele and their current focus of teaching and learning. Many CCMS grammar schools are resisting the pressure to convert.

Another type of school that falls into the category of voluntary maintained is the *Irish-medium school*. Irish-medium schools 'seek to extend the availability of Irish-medium Education (IME) to parents who wish to avail of it for their children' (Comhairle 2014). They 'welcome children from all faiths and backgrounds' (Comhairle 2014) and do not select pupils on their academic ability.

There are currently 28 IME primary schools and one post-primary school in the province, and an additional 10 Irish-medium units are attached to English-medium host schools. The governance of IME schools falls to each board of governors, which has authority to appoint teachers, although the employing authority for non-teaching staff is EANI. IME schools are supported by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (the trust fund for IME), which was established by DENI in August 2000 with the remit to promote Irish-medium education.

The majority of NI's traditional grammar schools (50) fall under the category of *non-maintained voluntary schools*, where pupils are admitted on the basis of their academic ability. Approximately 15 per cent of the running costs of voluntary grammar schools are met by fees charged to parents and from legacy investments. Each board of governors is designated as the employing authority. The voluntary grammar sector is supported by the Governing Bodies Association Northern Ireland and comprises both Catholic and non-denominational schools, and both single-sex schools and co-educational.

Grant maintained integrated schools

Of the remainder of schools in NI, 62 fall under the category of *grant maintained integrated (GMI) schools*:

> These schools seek to add value to the education process by inviting Protestants and Catholics to come together with other traditions in order to improve their understanding of one another, their own cultures, religions and values.
>
> (NI Direct 2014)

Integrated schools are managed by their own boards of governors, who act as the employing authority for teachers, and are supported by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

Independent schools

NI also has 14 i*ndependent schools*, mainly established by independent Protestant churches. They are not grant-aided. Independent schools set their own curriculum and admissions policies and are funded by fees paid by parents and income from investments. Each independent school must be registered with DENI and is inspected regularly by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

School curriculum in Northern Ireland

The revised curriculum was introduced to schools in September 2007 after a lengthy review of previous curriculum guidelines. The Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) commissioned a major cohort study that collected the views of almost 3,000 pupils in 51 schools (Harland *et al.* 2002). The pupils considered that the pre-2007 curriculum:

- ■ lacked breadth and balance; and
- ■ should be more relevant and enjoyable.6

The studies suggested that teachers felt there was:

- ■ too much emphasis on content; and
- ■ too little emphasis on emotional, social, cultural and moral development.

In addition to these studies, other influences included studies on thinking skills and neuroscience, information and communication technology (ICT) initiatives, European trends, and advice from the business and employment sector. Taking all this information into consideration, CCEA set about designing the revised NI curriculum for phased implementation in September 2007.

Overview of the revised curriculum

The revised curriculum (CCEA 2007) aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives as an individual, a contributor to society and a contributor to the economy and the environment. This is to be achieved by introducing Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at the top level which at Key Stage (KS) 3 and KS4 comprises Personal Development, Local and Global Citizenship, Employability and Home Economics (KS3 only) (see Figure 7.4.1).
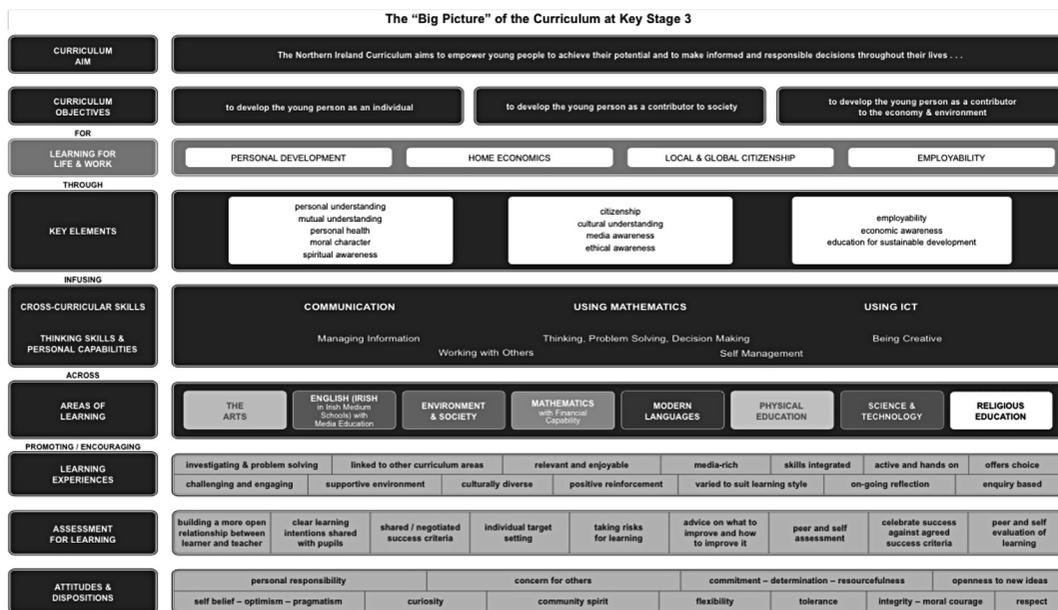
Figure 7.4.1 CCEAe 7. 7.power young peoplcurriculum at Key Stage 3 (available at: www.nicurriculum.otg.uk/docs/key_stage_3/Big-Picture-KS3.pdf)

Table 7.4.1 Areas of learning in the revised curriculum

Area of learning	Subject strands
The Arts	Art and Design, Drama and Music
Language and Literacy with Media Education	English or Irish in Irish Medium Schools
Mathematics and Numeracy	Mathematics; Financial Capability
Environment and Society	History and Geography
Modern Languages	French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian, Irish, etc.
Physical Educatoon	PE
Science and Technology	Science, Technology and Design
Religious Education	RE

LLW was a new learning area designed to specifically address the curriculum objectives. The statements of minimum requirement for all other subjects are articulated under the curriculum objectives and make reference to the key elements, which include personal development, mutual understanding, moral character, cultural understanding, media awareness and economic awareness. The phasing in process of the revised curriculum (2007–wh09) allowed schools the opportunity to make changes to curriculum plans, units of work and assessment procedures. During this phase, schools received support from Curriculum Advisory Support Staff (CASS), whose role was to assist schools and departments in amending their schemes of work, planning for effective implementation of the revised curriculum and easing any worries or concerns. By its nature, the revised curriculum is flexible and provides schools with greater freedom when it comes to delivering each subject strand, thereby allowing schools to deliver the curriculum in a way that suits the specific needs of their pupils. The philosophy behind the curriculum is based on the ideals of social constructivism, where the process of learning is paramount and is considered every bit as important as the end product. In order to implement the curriculum effectively, schools must embrace the principles of this curriculum, where there is an emphasis on active learning, whereby pupils engage with curriculum content and take ownership of their learning. Delivering such a curriculum therefore requires teachers to facilitate pupil learning in an active and stimulating environment.

A key aspect of the revised curriculum is a focus on the cross-curricular skills of ICT, mathematics and communication. Since 2012, schools are required to assess and report annually on pupils' progression in the cross-curricular skills. Embedding these skills across a range of curricular subjects requires effective planning and promotes a whole-school approach to teaching and learning, whereby subject departments must collaborate with other departments and search for effective cross-curricular opportunities. Many schools will have engaged in a process called curriculum mapping, a process for collecting and recording curriculum-related data that identifies core skills and content taught, processes employed and the types of assessments used for each subject area. This allows schools to document the relationship between every component of the curriculum and, in doing so, allows educators to check for inconsistencies, misalignments and weaknesses in the school curriculum, as well as helping identify opportunities for integration among subjects and the reviewing of assessment methods.

There is a strong emphasis across the curriculum on developing pupils' thinking skills and personal capabilities (TSPC), which include managing information, working with others, thinking, problem-solving and decision-making, self-management and being creative. The development of these skills is at the core of curriculum delivery and is critical if teachers are to fulfil the curriculum aim and objectives, which aims to prepare our young people to be effective contributors to society, the economy and the environment.

An example of a 'thinking skills' activity is provided in Table 7.4.1.

Now complete Task 7.4.1.

✏ Task 7.4.1 The "odd one out' activity

1   On your own, identify the similarities and differences between the well-known faces.

2   Then select the 'odd one out'.
3   Share and explain your choice to a partner.
4   As a pair, share and explain your choice to another pair.

Table 7.4.2 Examples of debriefing questions

■	How did you arrange the objects?
■	What assumptions did you make, and why?
■	Tell me more about . . .
■	What do you mean by . . .
■	How did your ideas change over time?
■	How did your group operate?
■	How did you resolve disagreements?
■	If you did it again, what would you do differently?

✏ Task 7.4.2 Plan a thinking skills activity

Create an 'odd one out' activity for your subject.

The 'odd one out' activity (Task 7.4.1) and the subsequent debriefing questions in Table 7.4.1 show that there can be more than one credible answer and more than one way to reach an answer. They also show that it can be helpful to 'struggle' when thinking about a problem. Remember that in these activities, it is the dialogue that is more important than the answers. Tasks 7.4.2 and 7.4.3 ask you to plan a thinking skills activity for your subject.

✏ Task 7.4.3 Prepare a lesson involving thinking skills

1   Identify a thinking skill to be introduced/practised/assessed in the lesson.
2   Decide what thinking vocabulary is needed during the lesson.
3   Design tasks to introduce/practise/assess the chosen skill .d in the lesson.y to reach an answer. They pupil interest.
4   Identify indicators that show your pupils are using the thinking skill sson.y to reach an answer. They puto be aware of.
5   Consider the challenges that the pupils might face – how can they be overcome?
6   Consider the ideas that pupils may generate – how can you stretch them further? Be prepared for their thinking to be different or even better than yours!
7   Prepare your debrief questions – focus on the thinking skill.

Assessment for Learning in the NI curriculum

The focus on assessment is central to the philosophy behind the revised curriculum. The recognition that effective assessment enhances teaching and learning is evident in the curriculum design. The curriculum promotes Assessment for Learning (AfL) where there is a deliberate focus on formative assessment methods. The Assessment Reform Group (ARG 2002) defined AfL as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go next, and how best to get them there' (p.1). In the revised curriculum, the components of AfL are:

- ■ effective planning (school and classroom level);
- ■ sharing learning intentions;
- ■ agreeing success criteria;
- ■ effective questioning;
- ■ constructive feedback; and
- ■ pupil self-reflection, including peer and self-assessment.

Effective planning includes setting learning intentions, which describe what the pupils should know, understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson (or series of lessons). Learning intentions should be shared with the pupils and should thus be written in pupil-friendly language. You should discuss why pupils are learning what you intend to teach with them. Consider pupil views and try to reach a shared intention. When learning intentions have been agreed and shared, it is important to establish success criteria so that pupils know what success looks like, thus helping pupils to be aware of how well they are doing during the lesson. The success criteria could summarise the key steps required in order to fulfil the learning intention.

When one considers the definition of AfL above, it is obvious that its key purpose is to encourage further learning; therefore, the validity of AfL practices will be judged on whether actual further learning takes place. Teachers and pupils must establish where the pupil is in his or her learning through meaningful observations and conversations. Once established, the purpose of AfL is to support learners' learning on a continuous basis (Tveit 2014) and, if it is effective, it has the potential to 'close the gap' from 'where learners are at' (actual performance) to 'where they want to be' (desired performance) by telling them how to get there (use of feedback to move learners on in their learning). Therefore, delivering quality constructive feedback is a critical component of AfL. The following task (7.4.4) will allow you to think about constructive feedback.

✎ Task 7.4.4 Assessing constructive feedback

Rate the following feedback statements as 1–10, where 1 = non-constructive and 10 = highly constructive:

	Feedback statement	Your rating (1–10)
1	Tell me more. What do they look like? How do they move?	
2	Gold star	
3	Explain why you think this	
4	How do you think he felt? ■ Angry that people did not trust him ■ Annoyed with himself for lying in the past	
5	Beautiful, neat work	
6	Well done!	
7	Say how you think this made him feel	
8	Develop these ideas further	
9	Describe the expression on his face	
10	Good, but not as good as your brother's	
11	How do you think Darry; felt about not bring believed? Do you think he might have regretted anything he\d done?	
12	You must try harder	
13	First place in class	
14	Try one of these or one of your own instead of bad: ferocious, terrifying, evil	
15	A lovely story	
16	You're one of the best	
17	10/10	
18	He showed me he was a good friend when . . . [finish this sentence]	
19	Very good start. Count how many times you have used the word 'said'. What other words could you have used	
20	What did you see on your boat trip? Fish, birds, people?	

AfL is therefore a key aspect of ITE in NI. Even though the curriculum does not require teachers to integrate AfL practices into their teaching, it is strongly recommended as best practice (CCEA 2007).

Entitlement Framework

The Entitlement Framework sets out the minimum number and range of courses that schools should offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16. DENI provided its latest guidance on the implementation of the Entitlement Framework in April 2015. The entitlement framework is the post-14 curriculum that puts the needs of pupils first. It aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live (DENI 2015). DENI5) rationale for increasing the level of choice is very straightforward: 'We know that young people stand the best chance of succeeding and achieving if they can follow courses that interest and inspire them and that can take them on, through further and/or higher education or through training, to fulfilling careers' (DENI 2010a). The target for all schools in 2015/16 is to be in a position to offer the following number of subjects at KS4 and post-16:

- ■ Key Stage 4 – 24 courses
- ■ Post-16 – 27 courses

A third of these courses must be general and a third applied, while schools must also provide:

- ■ at least one course to cover each of the areas of learning; and
- ■ at least one course in an official language of the European Union (other than English, and in Irish-speaking schools, Irish).

The nature of course provision is defined in terms of whether it leads to a general or applied qualification (CCEA 2015). A general qualification is one where knowledge, understanding and skills are developed within a subject context. Assessment will be mainly through written tasks. An applied qualification is one where knowledge, understanding and skills can be developed through practical demonstration and/or within a context related to employability and assessment will take place in this same context (CCEA 2015).

Initial teacher education in Northern Ireland

In NI, the only routes into school teaching are the traditional Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes. Most post-primary level teachers study through one of the two universities (PGCE), both of which are mixed in terms of religion and gender. However, most primary student teachers study in either Stranmillis University College (mostly Protestant) or St Mary's University College (mostly Catholic) towards a four-year B.Ed.

Set against this background, ITE programmes in NI provide student teachers with opportunities to consider how they, as future teachers, can best promote reconciliation and tolerance in a post-conflict society.

All full-time PGCE programmes are offered only at Master's (M) level in NI, with the consequence that all entrants must hold an honours degree or its equivalent. PGCE student teachers are examined

at postgraduate level for school placements, and at M-level for university-based modules; the advantage of this is that they earn M-level credit, which can be 'cashed in' for module exemption in future M-level courses. Furthermore, in the spirit of the Bologna Declaration (1999), it is hoped that the 120 postgraduate points earned from the NI PGCE will create parity of esteem with the Republic of Ireland's two-year equivalent, a significant advantage for those wishing to broaden their career prospects south of the border. The advantage to schools is that emerging teachers from the PGCE programmes are both academically capable and competent classroom practitioners.

Professional competence

The professional competences to be developed by teachers at all levels of their careers were reviewed and published by the General Teaching Council in NI (GTCNI 2007) in a booklet entitled *Teaching: The Reflective Profession*. In this document, the GTCNI suggests that it has 'consistently rejected any attempt to adopt a reductionist approach to professional development' (p. 4) and that the adoption of a competence-based system allows for the conceptualization of professional development as 'organic, and to an extent evolutionary, reflecting a synthesis of research, experiences gained and expertise shared in communities of practice' (p. 4). To some, this may seem paradoxical, as the very fact of articulating generic competences could be considered as 'reductionist'. The GTCNI argues that it has been 'conscious that the teacher competences must be considered holistically and not treated as a series of discrete entities, divested of values or a sense of mission and professional identity' (p. 5). The GTCNI understanding of a teacher is as an 'educator and moral agent' who is:

> knowledgeable, skilful, reflective . . . and concerned with the purposes and consequences of education, as well as . . . technical proficiency; be prepared to experiment with the unfamiliar and learn from their experiences; have an approach characterized by open-mindedness and wholeheartedness; be committed to professional dialogue in collaboration with colleagues, in school and beyond; have working patterns characterized by a process of action, evaluation and revision; and . . . assume, as life-long learners, responsibility for their ongoing professional development.
>
> (GTCNI 2007: 9)

The reflective and activist practitioner

The GTCNI concept of a reflective and activist practitioner sees the teacher as a moral agent and an informed, knowledgeable practitioner. This is illustrated in Figure 7.4.2.

Figure 7.4.2 suggests that each of the four areas of values and attitudes, mission and purpose, sense of professional autonomy, and knowledge and competence contributes towards the development of the reflective and activist teacher in a dynamic interaction that serves to reproduce the reflective and activist components as each area develops.

Figure 7.4.2 The concept of the reflective and activist practitioner (redrawn from the competence booklet) (GTCNI 2007: 10)

In seeking to make more explicit the attributes, skills and knowledge that teachers as professionals should possess and exemplify, the GTCNI set out 27 new competence statements, under three broad headings. These are:

■   professional values and practice;
■   professional knowledge and understanding;
■   professional skills and application;
■   planning and leading;
■   teaching and learning; and
■   assessment.

Competence statements

The new competence statements are 'predicated upon the notion that the achievement of competence is a developmental process which, of necessity, transcends early teacher education and continues throughout a teacher's career' (GTCNI 2007: 11). They therefore effectively underpin all phases of early teacher education and professional development. The achievement of competence depends on:

■   the nature and level of the teacher's experience and their personal effectiveness;
■   the work-based context; and
■   the roles teachers experience and the development opportunities arising from such experiences.

The full description of the 27 competence statements is articulated, with exemplars for the initial, induction, EPD and continuing professional development (CPD) stages of a teacher's career are on pp. 16–43 of the competence booklet (GTCNI 2007). The summary outlines of the statements are set out on pp. 13–15. Full details are available on the website (www.gtcni.org.uk/).

Each of the competences is articulated progressively for the different stages in a teacher's career from ITE to continuing professional development. They progress in terms of complexity and sophistication but each assumes that teachers relate theory to practice at all career stages.

Now complete Task 7.4.5.

✎ **Task 7.4.5 Reflect on your current level of competence**

Consider the statements of competence for your course. Rank them in groups representing your self-perception of how well you demonstrate each (a) during your ITE course and (b) during your first year of teaching.

Code of values and professional practice

The code of values and professional practice indicated in the first competence statement is considered as 'eloquent testimony to the profession's commitment to excellence in and for all' (GTCNI 2007: 44). This code seeks to 'set out clearly the core values underpinning professional practice; encourage attitudes and conduct commensurate with the core values of the profession; provide a framework for evaluating both policies and practice; and enhance the status of the profession in the eyes of the public' (GTCNI 2007: 44).

The core values of the profession are: trust, honesty, commitment, respect, fairness, equality, integrity, tolerance and service. These values are to be exemplified 'in their work and in their relationships with others; recognising, in particular, the unique and privileged relationship that exists between teachers and their pupils' (GTCNI 2007: 45). Teachers will at all times be conscious of their responsibilities to others (learners, colleagues and the profession).

The competences articulate the way that it is envisioned that teachers will progress through their careers. During the PGCE programme in NI, student teachers complete a 'formative profile' report after their first extended school placement, in which they self-assess their progress against the competences. This document is discussed with a tutor and consensus is reached in terms of strengths and targets on which student teachers will concentrate during the second extended school placement. Following this, student teachers complete a 'career entry profile' report. This report indicates the direction for support during induction and is given to the employer responsible for mapping the course of induction and EPD for the new teacher.

New teachers follow a process of induction during their first year of teaching, during which they are observed and supported in the production and implementation of a personalised action plan. There follows two further years of EPD, in which teachers complete portfolios of whole-school issues, such as discipline, pastoral care or ICT use in the school. Having completed this stage, teachers then embark on CPD in their chosen direction, be that towards school management or towards expert teacher status.

The teaching profession in Northern Ireland

There is no such thing as qualified teacher status (QTS) in NI! Successful completion of either the B.Ed or PGCE programmes gives young teachers the opportunity to apply for registration with the

General Teaching Council in Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Having gained their Teacher Reference Number, they can begin applying for teaching positions throughout the province.

Once appointed to a teaching position – whether permanent, temporary, full-time or part-time – junior teachers are obliged to 'alert the principal and/or teacher-tutor to their position and to the need for discussion of induction requirements' (DENI 2010b: 59). This will begin their three-year period of Induction and EPD. The process is managed by the school and supported by EANI. It relies heavily on building a tailored programme for each individual based on his or her career entry profile – a record of the assessment of the student teachers' competences on completion of the ITE programme.

EPD is the third stage of teacher education, a continuous integrated process that commences with ITE and progresses through the induction stage. The emphasis in EPD shifts from teachers teaching to how children and young people learn. Similar to the induction stage, the EPD stage is not an option, but an essential part of 'further training and professional development' in which all teachers are required to participate (reference: Teachers (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (NI) 1987).

Having passed EPD, teachers in NI are expected to continue their professional development through the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) process operated by each school. Guidelines issued by DENI state that the scheme aims to:

- Recognise the contribution of teachers to achieving the aims of the School Development Plan and help them to identify ways of enhancing their skills and performance.
- Identify the professional needs and necessary resources to support teachers, in their professional development and career progression.
- Increase teachers' participation in decision-making and career planning, and develop in teachers a greater sense of control over their work.
- Enhance the quality of education.
- Inform the management of schools.
- Improve teacher morale and motivation.
- Be seen by staff as enabling
- Be manageable and minimise bureaucracy.

PRSD is not directly related to teachers' pay until they apply for the first of three threshold assessments after approximately six years of teaching.

Promotional allowances

Promotional allowances are awarded to teachers usually in response to advertised internal positions. These range from basic responsibilities (e.g. for locker management) to those of Head of Year/Department, or, for example, Curriculum/Assessment Leader. Traditionally, positions above and including that of Vice Principal have been advertised externally but more recently, lower (middle management) posts have been finding their way into the national press. Such moves do enhance teacher mobility throughout the province but these are still conspicuous through absence.

Large schools often provide clearly defined promotional pathways. One can either rise through the ranks by acquiring skills and experience in pastoral care leading eventually to a Head of Year position or Vice Principal (Pastoral), or alternatively through curriculum development, leading to

Head of Department and Vice Principal (Curriculum). Teachers in smaller schools (i.e. less than 800 pupils) may be expected to combine pastoral and curricular responsibilities to ascend through the ranks but gain an inherent advantage by acquiring a broader experience and greater career potential, especially if they have their eyes set on headship.

The future of education in Northern Ireland

Education in NI will face many challenges over the coming years. In light of unfavourable findings from the Equality Commission (October 2015), which highlighted (inter alia) poor academic attainment by those from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly Protestant males. The government in NI must address the issue of academic selection at a substantive level, the decision by selective schools to continue academic selection has proven to have had a detrimental impact upon many pupils who attend non-selective schools, particularly Protestant males. While pupils in selective schools are achieving and succeeding, many pupils attending non-selective schools continue to underachieve. Connolly et al. (2013) have highlighted that the odds of those entitled to free school meals securing a grammar school place are nearly five times lower than others, while the odds of a young person achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C, including English and maths, in NI are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school. There is an onus on our politicians, church leaders, academics and parents to aim to build an improved education system where all pupils have an opportunity to achieve their potential.

Shared education

Considering the nature of school division in NI and the move towards a shared political future, it is no surprise that the government of NI are aiming for a move towards increased utilisation of shared education. In July 2012, John O'Daid (Minister for Education) appointed a ministerial advisory group whose role was to explore and bring forward recommendations on how to advance shared education in NI. Connolly et al. (2013: 7) provided a definition of shared education, stating:

Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

There are many positive examples in NI where shared education is working very effectively both at primary and post-primary level. According to Connolly et al. (2013), there exists a strong body of research at international level that highlights the benefits of schools collaborating together across sectors in a sustained and meaningful way. There are many examples in NI where two neighbouring post-primary schools share both teaching staff and physical resources, resulting in pupils from both schools having access to a wider range of subjects and courses than they would have had previously.

Integrated versus shared?

There are many from the integrated sector who believe that integrated education represents the most effective model for shared education and that any attempt to advance shared education must involve the promotion of integrated schooling. Connolly et al. (2013) acknowledge integrated education as a distinctive sector that reflects a particular all-inclusive religious and philosophical ethos. However, Connolly et al. (2013: 15) argue that:

Promoting one particular sector runs counter to the vision of a diverse and plural system . . . and is not a model for advancing shared education . . . Actively promoting one sector over other sectors will not only be divisive but it will not, in itself, lead to the educational benefits that accrue from schools sharing good practice and collaborating together.

The latest report from the Committee for Education on the Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education (2015) has produced a number of key recommendations as to how DENI can promote shared education more widely and thus involve a greater number of schools.

Initial teacher education

Central to the future of education in NI is the future of ITE. As previously highlighted, most secondary student teachers study through one of the two universities, both of which are mixed in terms of religion and gender. However, most primary student teachers study in either Stranmillis University College (mostly Protestant) or St Mary's University College (mostly Catholic). The latest review of teacher education in NI highlighted the need for a more shared and integrated approach to ITE. Dr Stephen Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning), in publishing the Aspiring to Excellence report (Final Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland) on 1st July 2014 to the NI Assembly, emphasised that the current provision is fragmented and inefficient. Dr Farry also highlighted that while all institutions were open to everyone irrespective of their background, there is, nevertheless, considerable religious separation in the training of teachers' (p. 1). Dr Farry emphasised that it was debatable how far shared and integrated education could go in NI if sharing in ITE was itself not yet being maximised.

SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

This unit has sought to identify key features that make the NI Education system distinctive from the rest of the UK. The unit has also aimed to raise awareness of the structure and balance of the curriculum in NI and the preferred approaches when implementing the curriculum. It is intended that this unit presents a clear description of how schools are governed as well as an informed outline of the teaching profession in NI. The overall intention has been to stimulate thinking about the various issues that prospective and qualified teachers will encounter during their professional practice.

■ The NI Education system is a divided system, with almost 92 per cent of all post-primary pupils attending a school of their religious choice.
■ The divided schooling system means that different sectors have different arrangements for control and management.
■ The decision by many grammar schools to continue academic selection in the light of falling overall pupil numbers means that a greater percentage of the NI pupil population are attending grammar schools than ever before. The resulting impact has been exacerbated through the accommodation of integrated schools as an attractive option for parents to sending their children to a secondary school.

- There is no formally prescribed curriculum in NI, only a minimum entitlement, with schools having the autonomy to deliver the curriculum in a way that suits their pupils' needs.
- The philosophy of the NI curriculum is based on the ideals of social constructivism, whereby pupils are required to engage with learning material and in the process develop life skills that will develop them as individuals who can contribute to society, the economy and the environment.
- The decision to remove the Curriculum Advisory Support Service means that there has been a severe lack of provision for CPD among the teaching profession for almost 10 years. The absence of subject-specific support, coupled with ETI's emphasis on school leadership and non-subject-based inspections, has led to each school interpreting the curriculum under pressures and priorities considered more important than the minimum entitlement.
- There is a need to restructure the provision for ITE in NI, with the recognition that the move towards a one- or two-centre provider would enhance the overall quality of ITE in NI.
- The attainment gap that exists between the rich and poor in NI is ever-increasing and the government must tackle this issue immediately.
- There is a drive towards increasing shared education in NI, with is a drive towards increasing shared education in NIn NI is s and priorities considered more important than t.

Check which requirements for your ITE programme have been addressed through this unit.

Further reading

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Additional resources for this unit are available on the companion website: www.routledge.com/cw/Capel

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