



Middle Ability Students in Schools

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Introduction

The College serves a range of small communities in the countryside northwest of Auckland. These communities include five marae, traditional farming areas, many horticultural blocks, forestry, small industrial villages like Kumeu and Huapai, rural servicing districts such as Helensville and Kaukapakapa, a low cost housing village at Parakai and many lifestyle blocks.

The district reflects much of fifty-years-ago New Zealand: Largely European (75%) and Maori (25%) with very few Pacific families and almost no new immigrant New Zealanders. Most are without significant tertiary education and although they are comfortably off few are wealthy. There is a small, but significant number of poor families. In short, a decile 7 school where the material wellbeing comes not from having a top education but from hard work.

The College has always had a bimodal distribution of abilities and skills in its intake. Further, in each year the nature of the bi-modality is different.

The College gets good results for academically able students. It also is quite successful with students who have clear vocational goals in trades or semi-skilled work.

There is a big group of students in the middle who are in the fifteen percentile ranks either side of 50 who do not achieve as well as they could. This group are in the 40% of students who earned between 40 and 70 credits in Level 1 last year.

The College has been conservative in introducing Unit Standards in to Level 1. Last year about 21% of our students earned their credits from Unit Standards compared with 31% nationally.

Our conservative stance has been influenced by our desire to challenge students academically while providing interesting and relevant courses. We also wish to ensure that students protect and enhance their study options for later years. Consequently we have most courses dominated by achievement standards and a much smaller layer of courses defined by unit standards. This partly explains the results noted above.

In Year 12, where we have provided unit standards defined courses that are targeted at students of average ability, they have quickly become very popular. Food and Hospitality grew to two classes in one year and Tourism to three classes in three years.

Herein lies our current major dilemma. A significant number of students opt in to Tourism and out of History and Geography. This is bad because these students some of whom would pass, are opting out of a course that leads to UE. It is good because the pass rate for average ability students doing Tourism is significantly better than for those students doing History or Geography.

This is the nub of the rather odd debate going on about whether NCEA is dumbing down or not.

In recent years there has been a lot of talk about pathways and about individulising student progress through school. The pathway for academically able and committed students is clear. The pathway for those students heading towards trades is clear. It is also significantly improved now at Kaipara thanks to CaPBL and Gateway.

But pathways for average students are still unclear. The question of course guidance is complicated by our reluctance to direct students to courses, rather than counsel or challenge them to appropriate decisions. Much of our own experience is coloured by the long term consequences that fell to our peers at school who were placed in “commercial” or “vocational” courses despite their abilities.

What does an intellectually challenging course look like for a student who is not going to University or to Polytech but has average or about average ability and skill?

How do we manage pathways and student course selections in a small modern high school?

The age old question of the balance between a general secondary education and one that begins to specialize into tertiary academic or vocational preparation is still a central question underlying these considerations.

For Kaipara refreshing our course structures to better cater for our mix of students has become very important. So, too, has the question of managing student decision making about their courses and the provision of a menu of pathways that really does meet the needs of our students.

My objectives for the sabbatical leave were:

1. To investigate course design and curriculum pathways for students of middle ability (ie in the mid range percentiles 35-65) and the curriculum implications of providing for their needs.
2. To investigate ways in which pathways for these students are designed and the support and guidance policies and practices that underpin them.

Summary of Findings

I visited schools in Ireland, Leicestershire (England), Council Bluffs (Iowa, US) and Omaha (Nebraska, US). I also attended the ASCD Conference in New Orleans (Louisiana, US).

Curriculum

1. The view among professional educators favours a broad, general education.
2. There is still a commitment to a core curriculum expressed in mandatory subjects although the breadth of it and the extent to which it persists through the senior years varies considerably.
3. There is a growing recognition that optional or elective subjects should relate to broad clusters of careers of interest to students.
4. Meta-curriculum issues are increasing in importance in all systems. Meta-curriculum issues are features such as the values and competencies of the revised NZ National Curriculum which are seen as increasingly important in underpinning a coherent curriculum.

Qualifications

1. Qualifications systems are largely unified within national frameworks.
2. The UK and New Zealand both have flexible systems that allow parallel qualifications to exist in a defined relationship to the central secondary qualification.
3. Ireland and the US have more general, less flexible qualification structures.
4. All systems are working at ways in which career pathways and suitable pre-vocational studies can be added to the mainstream qualification frameworks.
5. The number of assessment points in senior secondary years varies. It is continuous in the US, there are three points in the UK and New Zealand and two points in Ireland.

Student Pathway Plans

1. All systems are becoming concerned about the way students proceed through high school to further education and employment.
2. All the countries are including ways of having students undertake some exploration of possible careers and of making pathway plans.
3. It is most systematic in the US where it is usually backed by a wide range of resources, clear school programmes, systematic implementation and regular review. It is largely run out of the high schools' guidance departments which have substantial resources committed to them.

Providing for Middle Ability students

1. The core curriculum subjects are taught at two or three levels of difficulty.
2. Option subjects are designed to provide an elective curriculum that is aligned to major clusters of careers.
3. There is a coherent and unified qualification structure which has qualification variants or parallel qualifications related to broad future pathways.
4. All students develop pathway plans that are regularly monitored and reviewed.

New Zealand

1. Our highly flexible curriculum structure and our highly flexible qualification system is both a strength and a weakness. It allows effective school based responses to student needs but requires every school to have a clear set of aims and goals for its overall curriculum structure.
2. School curriculum should remain committed to providing a broad, general platform for the education of senior secondary students. This means;
 - a. a meta-curriculum of values and competencies underpinning,
 - b. a core set of subjects which provide a few broad ranges of level of difficulty within them and are supported by;
 - c. a set of options that relate to broad clusters of careers

3. There should be a dynamic reflection of the sum of student pathways in the curriculum plan for the school.
4. The Schools Plus proposal to insist on learning plans for all students is welcome. Every student should have a pathways plan informed by a process of reflection on personal attributes and career interests. The plan should be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis throughout the student's school years.
5. For New Zealand this will largely be new and extra work. Significant staffing resources need to be provided for this by the Government

Kaipara College

Recommendations to the Board of Trustees:

1. The College should take steps to develop pathway plans for all students
2. The College should continue to develop the meta-curriculum initiatives, Habits of Mind and Thinking Skills, already in place.
3. The College should give thought to ways other meta-curriculum aspects expressed in the statements of values and competencies in the Revised National Curriculum could be implemented.
4. The College curriculum structure should be reviewed against these three principles:
 - a. a meta-curriculum of values and competencies underpinning,
 - b. a core set of subjects which provide a few broad ranges of level of difficulty within them and are supported by;
 - c. a set of options that relate to broad clusters of careers
5. There were a number of programmes that I saw that were very interesting. We should keep these in mind and reflect on their possible applicability to the College:
 - a. Parent, student and form teacher reviews of school progress instead of school reports and parent teacher nights.
 - b. The Irish Transition Year.
 - c. Access to Polytech or University courses for our students at a site or sites near the College
 - d. Aligning the entire curriculum to broad career pathways.
 - e. The modular timetable and independent learning philosophy of Westside High School.

Ireland

Current Curriculum Structure

The curriculum for all years is developed and specified by the Department of Education and Science while the secondary school examinations are managed by the State Examinations Commission.

The Curriculum statements would be familiar to any New Zealand teacher who remembers what School Certificate and University Entrance syllabus statements looked like. They are statements of the concepts and skills to be learned often accompanied by fairly general statements of the appropriate areas of content to be used in teaching them.

Qualifications

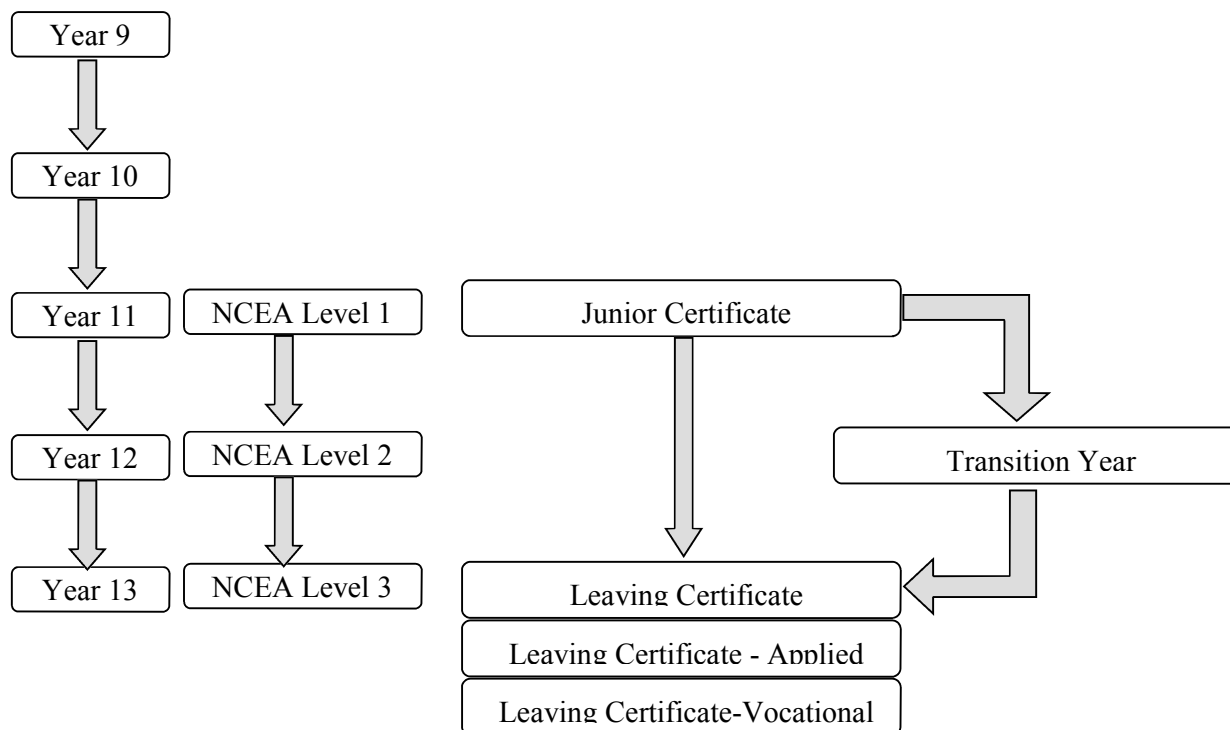
There are two principal qualifications in the Irish secondary system.

At the end of Year 10 (our Year 11) students sit the Junior Certificate examination. It is a year-end, written examination, mainly, that covers the material studied in the first three years of high school. The subjects available are in the table below.

Students then take their final two years to do the Leaving Certificate. This two year course is examined at the end of the second year. There are some subjects with some internal assessment and some subjects with assessment by submission. There are two variants of the Leaving Certificate; Leaving Certificate - Vocational and Leaving Certificate - Applied.

Between the Junior Certificate year and the start of the two year Leaving Certificate programme students have the option of doing a Transition Year programme. This is effectively an additional year of high school between, in New Zealand terms, Year 11 and Year 12.

The relationship between the New Zealand system and the Irish is illustrated below.



Subjects available to students at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.
The availability of these subjects in any school depends on the school's size.

Junior Certificate		Leaving Certificate	
Subject	Levels	Subject	Levels
Irish	Higher, Ordinary & Foundation	Irish	Higher, Ordinary & Foundation
English	Higher, Ordinary & Foundation	English	Higher and Ordinary
Mathematics	Higher, Ordinary & Foundation	Mathematics	Higher, Ordinary & Foundation
		Applied Mathematics	Higher and Ordinary
Science	Higher and Ordinary	Physics	Higher and Ordinary
Science (with Local Studies)	Higher and Ordinary	Chemistry	Higher and Ordinary
		Physics and Chemistry	Higher and Ordinary
		Agricultural Science	Higher and Ordinary
		Biology	Higher and Ordinary
Civic, Social & Political Education	Common		
Environmental & Social Studies	Higher and Ordinary		
History	Higher and Ordinary	History	Higher and Ordinary
Geography	Higher and Ordinary	Geography	Higher and Ordinary
Classical Studies	Higher and Ordinary	Classical Studies	Higher and Ordinary
Hebrew Studies	Higher and Ordinary	Hebrew Studies	Higher and Ordinary
Religious Education	Higher and Ordinary	Religious Education	Higher and Ordinary
Latin	Higher and Ordinary	Latin	Higher and Ordinary
Ancient Greek	Higher and Ordinary	Ancient Greek	Higher and Ordinary
French	Higher and Ordinary	French	Higher and Ordinary
German	Higher and Ordinary	German	Higher and Ordinary
Spanish	Higher and Ordinary	Spanish	Higher and Ordinary
Italian	Higher and Ordinary	Italian	Higher and Ordinary
		Arabic	Higher and Ordinary
		Russian	Higher and Ordinary
		Japanese	Higher and Ordinary
Business Studies	Higher and Ordinary	Business	Higher and Ordinary
		Accounting	Higher and Ordinary
		Economics	Higher and Ordinary
		Agricultural Economics	Higher and Ordinary
Technology	Higher and Ordinary		
Materials Technology (Wood)	Higher and Ordinary	Construction Studies	Higher and Ordinary
Metalwork	Higher and Ordinary	Engineering	Higher and Ordinary
Technical Graphics	Higher and Ordinary	Technical Drawing	Higher and Ordinary
Home Economics	Higher and Ordinary	Home Economics	Higher and Ordinary
Art (including crafts)	Higher and Ordinary	Art, Craft & Design	Higher and Ordinary
Music	Higher and Ordinary	Music	Higher and Ordinary

Source: Irish State Examination Commission

Each subject is available at two standards of performance; Higher and Ordinary. English and Maths are available at three as is Irish at Junior Certificate level. In each subject the syllabus is the same regardless of level.

Junior Certificate

St John the Baptist Community School, the school I visited, is a rural, co-educational secondary school about 40 kilometres outside Limerick. Its Junior Certificate programme includes:

8 Core subjects

- English
- Mathematics
- Irish
- Science
- History
- Geography
- French or German
- Civic, Social & Political Education

2 Optional subjects selected from a list of seven

- Home Economics
- Material Technology - Wood
- Material Technology - Metal
- Art
- Music
- Business Studies
- Technical Graphics

4 Non examination subjects

- Physical Education
- Information Technology
- Social Personal Health Education
- Religion

There are written examinations in each subject except Art.

Grades are awarded based on the percentage marks obtained in the examination.

Percentage Range	Grade
85 or over	A
70 but less than 85	B
55 but less than 70	C
40 but less than 55	D
25 but less than 40	E
10 but less than 25	F
Less than 10	No Grade

Leaving Certificate

St John the Baptist Community School offered these subjects in the Leaving Certificate Programme:

Core Subjects

- English
- Irish
- Mathematics

Option Subjects

French
Accounting
Physics
Construction Studies
Music
History
Chemistry
Home Economics
Art

Geography
Economics
Agricultural Science
Technical Drawing
German
Business
Biology
Engineering

There is an examination in each subject at the end of the second year. For languages this examination includes an oral component and for practical subjects it includes a project.

Subjects are graded based on the percentage marks.

The overall Leaving Certificate is awarded from the best six subjects of the seven usually studied.

Percentage Range	Grade
90 or over	A1
85 but less than 90	A2
80 but less than 85	B1
75 but less than 80	B2
70 but less than 75	B3
65 but less than 70	C1
60 but less than 65	C2
55 but less than 60	C3
50 but less than 55	D1
45 but less than 50	D2
40 but less than 45	D3
25 but less than 40	E
10 but less than 25	F
Less than 10	No Grade

Leaving Certificate Variants

There are two variants of the Leaving Certificate; Leaving Certificate - Vocational and Leaving Certificate - Applied.

Leaving Certificate - Vocational

The Leaving Certificate - Vocational is designed to provide a vocational focus to the Leaving Certificate itself. Students must:

1. Study a minimum of five Leaving Certificate subjects.
2. Two of these five must be selected from one of the vocational subject groupings in the table below.
3. Study the two Link Modules, namely Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education.
4. Take a modern European language

The Vocational subject groupings are:

1. Construction Studies or Engineering or Technical Drawing (any two)
2. Physics and Construction Studies or Engineering
3. Agricultural Science and Construction Studies or Engineering (combined subject)
4. Home Economics and Agricultural Science or Biology
5. Home Economics and Art
6. Accounting or Business or Economics (any two)
7. Physics and Chemistry
8. Biology and Chemistry or Physics or Physics & Chemistry (combined subject)
9. Biology and Agricultural Science Services Groupings
10. Engineering and Business or Accounting or Economics
11. Construction Studies and Business or Accounting or Economics
12. Home Economics and Business or Accounting or Economics
13. Agricultural Science and Business or Accounting or Economics
14. Art and Business or Accounting or Economics
15. Music and Business or Accounting or Economics

The Link Modules are assessed by written examination and by the presentation of a portfolio. The Leaving Certificates are endorsed with a Distinction, Merit or Pass grade to show the result in the Link Modules. Effectively these link modules constitute an additional subject which can count as any other subject does for admission to tertiary institutions.

The Leaving Certificate - Vocational provides an opportunity for students to explore a vocational area and to explore the work possibilities in an area in which they may be interested.

Leaving Certificate - Applied

The Leaving Certificate - Applied programme is a distinct, self-contained two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. It is designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to tertiary education or for those whose needs are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes.

It is a modular programme. Each module lasts for half a year and they are selected from a range of curriculum areas. There is a lot of flexibility available in putting a programme together as each subject area contains several modules. The subject areas are:

Vocational Preparation & Guidance	Mathematical Applications
English and Communications	Introduction to ICT
Irish	Modern Languages
Dance	Drama
Music	Visual Art
Social Education	Leisure & Recreation
Sign Language	Science
Religious Education	

Vocational Groups

Agriculture & Horticulture	Childcare/Community Care
Graphics and Construction Studies	Engineering
Technology	Hotel, Catering & Tourism
Hair and Beauty	Office Administration & Customer Care
Active Leisure Studies	ICT

Students take about 44 modules during the two year programme.

Assessment takes place by examination, assignment and portfolio production at the end of each module, ie each half year. In addition there are examinations at the end of the two year programme in:

- English and Communication
- Mathematical Applications
- Social Education
- Irish
- A modern European language
- Two subjects from the Vocational Group

The Awards

Credits towards the final award are accumulated throughout the two years of the programme in these categories:

Satisfactory completion of modules.	(Maximum of 62 credits)
Performance of students tasks.	(Maximum of 70 credits)
Performance in the final examinations.	(Maximum of 68 credits)

The credit total determines the quality of the final Award.

120 - 139 credits	earns	Pass
140 - 169 credits	earns	Merit
170 - 200 credits	earns	Distinction

The Transition Year

The Transition Year is a year of an alternative school programme available to students after Junior Certificate. It is designed to “offer pupils space to learn, mature and develop in the absence of examination pressure.”

Specifically the Department of Education and Science states that the “Transition Year aims are:

1. Education for maturity with the emphasis on personal development including social awareness and increased social competence.
2. The promotion of general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and self-directed learning.
3. Education through experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity.”

Source: Irish Department of Education and Science

Schools providing Transition Year programmes have responsibility for setting appropriate goals and defining the objectives necessary for their achievement and for the effective delivery of the programme. The schools are expected to involve parents, work providers and the wider community in aspects of the programme. Distinctive features include:

- The broad sweep of the programme.
- The wide range of teaching styles expected to be used.
- The broad range of assessment methods called upon.

The year is not certificated by the Department but can be certificated by the schools.

The Programme

The programme is modular and is designed to let students explore aspects of the full range of subjects in the school. It will typically draw on material from these curriculum areas:

- Civic Social and Political Education
- Personal and Social Development
- Health Education
- Guidance
- Religion
- Philosophy
- Aesthetics Education
- Physical Education
- Language Studies
- English
- Maths
- Science
- Environmental and Social Studies
- Information Technology

In addition the programme will include these activities:

- A Practical Project
- A Business or Enterprise project
- Preparation for Adult Life
- A Personal Challenge or two
- A Group Project
- A Community Service
- An international trip

Teaching Methods

Teaching methodologies are expected to be broad and diverse. The programme typically calls on these approaches:

- Negotiated learning.
- Personal responsibility in learning.
- Activity-based learning.
- Integration of appropriate areas of learning.
- Team teaching approaches.
- Group work: discussion, debate, interview, role play.
- Project work and research.
- Visiting speakers and seminars.
- Study visits and field trips.
- Work experience, work simulation, community service.

Assessment

All the programmes activities are assessed. Schools have considerable latitude with this. Generally tests and examinations are avoided in favour of methods such as:

- Written, practical, oral and aural assessments.
- Reports of work experience.
- Projects.
- Portfolios.
- Exhibition of work.
- Student diary/log book to record personal progress.
- Rating scales.
- Record of skills and competence attained.

There is student involvement in the assessment process. Conversations with tutors and self ratings on performance scales are common. Written observations from students and parents are also encouraged.

Aside from the school issued certificate at the end of the programme students should have:

- A completed diary/log book or journal for his/her personal evaluation.
- A student profile and record of achievement from the school.

Transition Year at St John the Baptist Community School

At St John the Baptist Community School the Transition Year Programme includes:

1. Academic modules from the Leaving Certificate courses with adapted teaching and assessment methods.
2. Activities that include
 - a. Learning a musical instrument
 - b. Staging a school musical production
 - c. Peer reading with primary school students
 - d. An individual community service project
 - e. Work experience
 - f. The production of a Road Safety Campaign as part of a national competition
 - g. A trip to Italy
 - h. The President's Award (equivalent to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme)
 - i. Setting up a mini-company
 - j. Running the school banking service
 - k. Debating

All the Transition students of the school are involved in these activities. In many cases the activities require the entire Transition Year group to cooperate in planning and implementing a single activity.

This year of the 130 students completing Junior Certificate:

50 chose the Transition Year Programme

60 went straight into the two year Leaving Certificate programme

20 went into the two year Leaving Certificate Applied programme

The school reports that it is a common experience for their top students in the Leaving Certificate programme to have done the Transition Year.

The Senior Management Team was very happy that the Transition Year provides the opportunity for a stimulating year of education that results in students:

Developing a wide range of independent learning skills.

Learning a lot about themselves.

Developing clearer objectives for their next years of education.

Nationally the programme has been evaluated several times since being introduced in the early 1990s. Among the evaluators' comments:

"Students who take a TYP had a higher grade point average in Leaving Certificate as well as increased entry level to higher education. Students were also found to take a broader range of courses at third level than non TY students."

'The Transition Year Programme An Assessment.'
Emer Smyth, Delma Byrne & Carmel Hannan.
The Economic and Social Research Institute 2004

"Leaving Certificate students who had taken the TYP were more likely to be educationally adventurous than those in the 94 - 96 group. That is, they were more likely to retain subjects at Higher level, to move up from Ordinary to Higher level and from Foundation to Ordinary level. They were also more likely to take up subjects which they had not taken before."

*From 'Junior to Leaving Certificate.
A Longitudinal Study of 1994 Junior Certificate Candidates
who took the Leaving Certificate Examination in 1997'*
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Providing for Student Needs in Ireland

There is a fairly strong commitment to general education within the Irish secondary system. The growing awareness of the need to prepare students for the world of further study or work is provided for by:

Providing a fairly traditional range of school subjects at two or three different levels of difficulty	
A senior qualification structure with three layers built on a common curriculum platform:	
Leaving Certificate	Preparation for Tertiary study.
Leaving Certificate Vocational	An exploration of work and careers as an optional component of the Leaving Certificate.
Leaving Certificate Applied	Preparation for the work place and the exploration of careers of interest.

An optional additional year of schooling, the Transition Year, is available to 15 - 16 year olds that enables them to explore what the curriculum has to offer, explore the world of careers and work and become involved in a wide range of activities designed to broaden their outlook and skills base.

England

Curriculum

There is a National Curriculum. This is managed on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Curriculum statements and associated resources exist for these areas:

English	Mathematics	Science
Art & Design	Business Studies	Citizenship
Classical Studies	Design & Technology	Economics
Engineering	Geography	Health & Social Care
History	ICT	Law
Leisure & Tourism	Manufacturing	Modern Foreign Languages
Music	Personal, Social & Health Education	Physical Education
Psychology	Religious Education	Social Science

Not all areas have curriculum statements for Years 1 to 11. Some are restricted to senior and some to junior years. Curriculum statements have up to four specified points, called Key Stages, at which the progress of all students in achieving the curriculum goals are measured against the national curriculum levels. The Key Stages for the major curriculum areas are in the table below. The second group of subjects do not have statutory programmes of study but have frameworks and guidelines to assist schools to develop their own programmes of study.

Statutory National Curriculum Core (C) and Foundation (F) subjects				
	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11
English (C)	*	*	*	*
Mathematics (C)	*	*	*	*
Science (C)	*	*	*	*
Design and technology (F)	*	*	*	
ICT (F)	*	*	*	
History (F)	*	*	*	
Geography (F)	*	*	*	
Modern Foreign Languages (F)			*	
Art and design (F)	*	*	*	
Music (F)	*	*	*	
Physical education (F)	*	*	*	*
Citizenship (F)			*	*
Other Statutory School Subjects				
	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Age	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-16
Year groups	1-2	3-6	7-9	10-11
Religious Education	*	*	*	*
Careers Education			*	*
Sex Education			*	*
Work-related Learning				*

Source: UK National Curriculum Statement

Students in England study more subjects than students in New Zealand and what looks like a curriculum structure that offers early specialization is in fact quite broad when the full range of subjects studied by students at school is examined.

As in New Zealand, the national curriculum sets the broad agenda for senior secondary school qualifications but schools become more focussed on the qualification course syllabuses in the senior school. The curriculum in the post 16 secondary school is up to the Local Education Authority and the school but is set during negotiations with the Learning Skills Council which is charged with coordinating all post 16 training and with funding it.

Qualification Structure

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) oversees the work of the bodies that are accredited to award qualifications in schools, and elsewhere. It sets the lists of subjects that are available for GCSE and GCE (A Levels). While these lists have changed slightly over the years it is difficult to add new subjects to them.

The QCA also oversees all other awards including those in the area of the General Vocational Qualifications.

Schools can call on a range of other qualifications from those approved by the QCA to provide for wider or more specialist needs. In each case the senior course offering is approved and funded by the Learning Skills Council.

There are several bodies authorised by the QCA to offer examinations at GCSE and GCE Levels. It is common for schools to use more than one of these bodies. Some of these bodies also offer other qualifications with a vocational or industry focus as well. Schools can and do offer some of these qualifications to their students as part of their senior course structure.

Entry Level Certificate (ELC)

These are subject-based certificates for 14 – 16 year old students who are working at a level below that required from GCSE Grade G. They have these characteristics:

1. They are at Level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework.
2. The course material is pitched below grade G of a GCSE or vocational qualifications at level 1.
3. There are three sublevels in the courses to recognise small step gains in achievement.
4. Entry level qualifications can cover any area of learning from, for example, life skills to literacy, religious studies to retail.

It is not assessed by examination but by:

Externally set assignments, given when students are ready (50 %).

Internally assessed class work (50 %).

General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

GCSEs are the exams taken by most UK pupils of school-leaving age. They have these characteristics:

1. GCSEs are qualifications at Level 2 in the National Qualification Framework
2. GCSEs are mostly taken after a two-year subject-based course.
3. They are available in a wide range of over 50 subjects.
4. Some subjects are also offered as short-course qualifications, which are equivalent to half a standard GCSE.
5. Some subjects are offered as a double award, which are equivalent to two GCSEs.
6. Vocational GCSEs involve the study of a particular area of employment and the development of work-related skills: These are also described as applied GCSEs and most are double awards.

They are available in the following areas:

- Art and Design
- Applied Business
- Engineering
- Health and Social Care
- Information and Communication Technology (ITC)
- Leisure and Tourism
- Manufacturing
- Applied Science

7. GCSEs are the main entry requirements for study at Level 3 and may be required for some jobs.
8. Most subjects are available at the one level, called a tier in the UK system. However English, Science and most Languages are available in two tiers while Maths is available in three. The tiers target students at different expected grade levels in the course concerned. While at lower tiers they restrict the grade that can be achieved they allow more time for basic aspects of the courses to be taught and studied.

GCSEs are usually assessed by exams at the end of the course and coursework completed by the students during the course. Some modular GCSEs are assessed by regular end-of-module tests.

GCSE Award are graded A*-G. In subjects where foundation or higher tier papers are provided, grades C-G are available from the foundation tier and A*-D from the higher tier.

General Certificate of Education (GCE or A Levels)

GCE, or A levels, is normally taken as a two-year programme that is an extension of the related GCSE courses although it is not always necessary to have taken the subject at GCSE or equivalent to be able to take the A level course. The A level is regarded as the main route to higher employment and/or higher education.

A Levels are available in these subjects:

Accounting	Archaeology	Art and Design
Biblical Hebrew	Biology	Business Studies
Chemistry	Citizenship Studies	Classical Civilisation
Classics	Communication and Culture	Computing
Critical Thinking	Design & Technology	Dance
Drama & Theatre Studies	Economics and Business Studies	Economics
Electronics	English Language and Literature	English Language
English Literature	Environmental Studies	Film Studies
French	General Studies	Geography
Geology	Government & Politics	German
History	History of Art	Home Economics
Human Biology	ICT	Law
Mathematics	Mathematics (use of)	Media Studies
Moving Image Arts	Music	Music Technology
Performance Studies	Philosophy	Physical Education
Physics	Psychology	Religious Studies
Science	Science in Society	Sociology
Spanish	Statistics	Welsh
World Development		

The two year A Level programme is broken into 4 units each lasting half a year.

The first year (two units) constitutes the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) year and the second year (two units) the A2 year.

Most units are assessed by examination although the practical ones are assessed internally. Students receive grades for the AS year as well as for the two year A Level.

Recently a top grade of A* has been introduced to full A Level to recognise the top academic performances

A Level Variants

There are two variants of A levels:

- The Vocational Certificate of Education A Level
- The Advanced Extension Award

The Vocational Certificate of Education - A Level

The Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) parallels the GCE.

It has the AS/A2 structure of existing GCEs.

VCEs involve the study of a sector of industry. The areas available include:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Applied art and design | Applied business |
| Applied ICT | Applied science |
| Engineering | Health and social care |
| Leisure studies | Media: communication and production |
| Performing arts | Travel and tourism |

This qualification provides a broad introduction to a vocational area and to encourage distinctive teaching and assessment approaches, using work-related contexts..

Advanced extensions

The aim of the Advanced Extension to the A Level is to:

1. Challenge the top 10 percent of students nationally in each subject.
2. Ensure that the most able students are tested against standards comparable with the most demanding to be found in other countries.
3. Be accessible to all able students, whatever the specification they are studying.
4. Help differentiate between the most able candidates, particularly in subjects with a high proportion of A grades at advanced GCE.

The subjects available include:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Biology (including human) | Business | Chemistry |
| Critical thinking | Economics | English |
| French | Geography | German |
| History | Irish | Latin |
| Mathematics | Physics | Psychology |
| Religious studies | Spanish | Welsh |
| Welsh as a second language | | |

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

NVQs are vocational and occupational qualifications that are available at the 5 levels of the National Qualifications Framework. Over 80% of occupations in the UK have an NVQ of some sort to support them. While these are mostly taught in workplaces or tertiary settings, they can be taught in schools. Many schools do so.

One of the most common NVQs in schools is the BTEC qualification. Originally the acronym stood for Business and Technical Educational Council. Now it is a brand name and the courses offer a framework of more work related qualifications. They are suitable for the full range of ability levels. They can be taken as well as, or in place of, the GCSE and GCE. They allow progression to University.

BTECs are not exam-based qualifications. Instead, students study real-life, work-based case studies and complete projects and assessments, which contribute to achieving each unit studied. Results are graded as a Pass, a Merit or a Distinction.

There are several levels of BTEC. Each has an equivalence with the GCSE and GCE qualifications.

BTEC Entry Designed for students with learning difficulties or those who struggle with traditional learning.

BTEC Introductory Level 1 on the NQF.
Suitable for any student aged 14 upwards and are designed for those who are not able to achieve A*- C grade GCSEs, but who are motivated by a work related course.

BTEC Firsts Level 2 on the NQF.
Suitable for pre-16 students and designed for those who are capable of achieving A*- C grade GCSEs but wish to focus on a work related vocational qualification or work area.
May be taken along with core GCSE subjects eg English, Maths & Science.

BTEC Nationals Level 3/4 on the NQF.
Suitable for students who have a clear view of their future career.
Equivalent to A levels and are accepted by universities, further education colleges and employers.
There are more than 250 qualifications for students to choose from.
Recommended for those who have achieved at least four A*- C grade GCSEs or have completed a BTEC First.

BTEC HNDs & HNCs Level 5 on the NQF
The Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are widely recognised by universities and professional bodies.
150 qualifications available.
The HNC is often studied part-time alongside full-time employment.
There is a focus on management and other higher level technical skills.
Students can progress to the final year of a degree

There were also General National Vocational Qualifications in schools. They were school based vocational qualifications parallel to the GCSE and GCE that were replaced by Vocational GCSEs and Vocational GCEs so they could be incorporated into the GCSE/GCE framework. The Diplomas system is about to supplant them.

The Diplomas

The Original Proposal

In October 2004 a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Tomlinson presented its report on senior school qualifications. "14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform" proposed quite a radical restructuring of the UK secondary school qualifications.

It proposed that every student's course should consist of Core Learning and Main Learning. Core learning would include:

1. Specified levels of achievement in functional Mathematics, Literacy and ICT communication.
2. The completion of an extended project
3. The development of a range of common knowledge skills and attributes
4. An entitlement to wider activities
5. Support and guidance in planning and reviewing their learning and their career choices.

It was proposed that specifications of core learning levels be based on the at Key Stage 4 standards of the National Curriculum.

Main Learning would be chosen by the learner to develop knowledge skills and understanding of academic and vocational subjects which form the basis for work training, higher education or employment.

Achievement would be certified by a Diploma named after the line of main learning to which it related. A line of learning is a pathway of subjects and courses relating to a broad academic and vocational domain. The report envisaged that there would be about twenty of them including an 'open' one in which students would be able to choose a mix of subjects from different Diploma domains to study.

Diplomas would be awarded at four levels and each would be made with one of three endorsements; Pass, Merit or Distinction. The relationship with the present qualification structure would be:

Level	Diploma	Current Qualifications
1	Entry	Entry Level Certificates
2	Foundation	GCSE grades G - D, NVQ Level 1
3	Intermediate	GCSE grades C - A*, NVQ Level 2
4	Advanced	GCE (A level), GSE Vocational, NVQ Level 3

The Implementation

Diplomas have been introduced on a somewhat modified basis, alongside the current GCSE and GCE programmes. They have been built up according to the recommendations of the report and their programme contents have been aligned in many cases with those of the GCSE and GCE courses.

There will be three levels of Diploma:

Foundation Level is equivalent to 4 or 5 GCSE passes.

Higher Level is equivalent to 5 or 6 GCSE passes.

Advanced Level is equivalent to 3 A Levels.

There will eventually be 14 Diploma domains. They will be:

1. Construction and the Built Environment
2. Creative and Media
3. Engineering
4. Information Technology
5. Health and Social Care
6. Environmental and Land-based Studies
7. Business, Administration and Finance
8. Manufacturing
9. Hospitality and Catering
10. Hair and Beauty Studies;
11. Travel and Tourism
12. Public Services
13. Sport and Leisure
14. Retail

Each Diploma will involve:

1. Functional Skills Minimum standards in Maths, English and ICT communication.
2. Core Learning Studies in the areas which are central to the domain concerned.
3. A Student project An extended project will complete a Diploma.

They are two year programmes although it is possible to complete them in a shorter time. A lower level Diploma does not have to be completed in order to study a higher level Diploma. A Diploma is a general introduction to a career domain. It is not a substitute for an apprenticeship which is a training programme in a specific career.

The introduction of the Diplomas has resulted in a revised national curriculum structure for 14 to 16 year olds. Its components are:

1. Core Subjects English, Maths and Science
2. Foundation Subjects ICT, PR and citizenship
3. Mandatory courses Work related learning, enterprise, religious education, sex drug alcohol and tobacco education and careers education
4. Mandatory access to the following choices:
 - a. All of the 14 specialised Diplomas
 - b. At least one course from each of these areas; the arts, design and technology, the humanities, modern foreign languages

Post 16 education will continue to be approved and funded by the Learning Skills Council. Diplomas will be part of approved plans in the future. The LSC is involved in the planning and approval processes.

Diplomas are not substitutes for the GCSE or GCE. They will be taken alongside these qualifications in many cases. The Functional Skills aspect of the Diplomas will be covered by existing GCSE courses and the Core Learning of each domain is in many instances already parts of GCSE subjects. Diplomas have additional dimensions to straight GCSE and GCE programmes in that they will involve time in work places and the acquisition of work place skills such as safety awareness and team skills and the completion of projects.

The first five are being introduced in 2008/9. The last will be introduced in 2011.

They are being taught in school clusters. This means that a small group of schools that are close together and which may include Sixth Form Colleges and other institutions will cooperate in developing a Diploma programme. Schools are expected to specialize and to cooperate in that

specialization with their cluster of surrounding schools so that the full range of Diplomas will be available to the students attending the schools in the cluster.

Staff in both schools I visited were involved in introducing a Diploma course into their schools. At Ashby the Engineering Diploma was being introduced while at Lutterworth it was the ICT Diploma. In both cases the staff are keen on the idea and were looking forward to an extended programme in their subject areas. The only reservation that I detected was in the area of student pathways. Effectively opting for a Diploma course restricts the optional subjects that a student could study to those relating to the area of the Diploma. Staff were speculating on the extent to which this might compromise the commitment to a broad, general education.

The Gateway Process

“Schools, colleges and other providers wishing to offer the new Diplomas in 2008 (typically working as consortia), will need to pass through a Gateway process, which will assess their readiness for doing so. As part of this process they will need to show how they will work with other institutions to make the Diplomas available to as many young people as possible. The process will identify the level of professional development support that will need to be provided to prepare for first teaching of the Diplomas in September 2008 and will make sure that between them, institutions have the capacity, facilities and employer engagement to deliver. The aim will then be to focus support where it is most needed, so that there is an assurance that wherever a Diploma is on offer, the quality is high.”

Source: “14 – 19 Education and Skills: Implementation Plan

The main steps of the Gateway process, the process for gaining approval to teach Diploma courses, are:

1. Development of a Consortium
 - A local group of high schools and other educational institutions supported by local business that could between them deliver all the Diploma lines.
2. An application to a Regional Panel
 - a. A Consortium’s self assessment against a set of criteria under the following headings:
 - i. Collaboration management.
 - ii. Facilities.
 - iii. Workforce.
 - iv. Information, Advice and Guidance.
 - v. Employer engagement.
 - b. The Local Authority’s self assessment.
3. Feedback and further development leading to initial approval.
4. The preparation of detailed applications for approval for submission to the Awarding Body.

Ashby School

Ashby School is a co-educational senior high school of about 1700 students situated in Ashby de La Zouche in the county of Leicestershire. It was formed by the amalgamation of adjacent boys' and girls' grammar schools. It is thus on a split site. It is a specialist Languages and Technology College.

It is a county policy that all its secondary students attend middle schools then senior high schools and that the schools are all comprehensive. The policy of providing middle schools and senior high schools is currently being reviewed. This debate is a little controversial.

Ashby is involved with a local cluster of high schools and a Technical College to offer the first round of the Diploma courses. Ashby will be the site for the Engineering Diploma course.

The course offering at GCSE is quite typical of county high schools. Most courses are GCSE main stream courses with a selection of Entry Level, Vocational GCSE and NVQ courses available as well.

	Years 10 -11		Years 12-13 (Sixth Form)	
	<i>Course</i>	<i>Qual</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Qual</i>
English	English Spec A	GCSE	English Language	AS & A2
	English Literature	GCSE	English Language & Literature	AS & A2
			English Literature	AS & A2
			Film Studies	AS & A2
	Media Studies	GCSE		
Mathematics	Mathematics Modular	GCSE	Mathematics	AS & A2
	Statistics	GCSE	Further Mathematics	AS & A2
Science	Science A (double)	GCSE		
	Biology	GCSE	Biology	AS & A2
	Chemistry	GCSE	Chemistry	AS & A2
	Physics	GCSE	Physics	AS & A2
	Applied Science (double)	GCSE	Applied Science	AS & A2
	Additional Applied Science	GCSE		
	Applied Science Diploma	BTEC		
Humanities	Geography	GCSE	Geography	AS & A2
	History	GCSE	History	AS & A2
	Religious Studies	GCSE	Religious Studies	AS & A2
	Citizenship Studies	GCSE	Government & Politics	AS & A2
			Psychology	AS & A2
			Critical Thinking	AS & A2
	Economics	GCSE	Economics	AS & A2
			Business Studies	AS & A2
			Business Applied	AS & A2
		Travel & Tourism 1 st Diploma	BTEC	
	Travel & Tourism 1 st Cert	BTEC		
			General Studies	AS & A2
Foreign Languages	French	GCSE	French	AS & A2
	Applied French	GCSE		
	German	GCSE	German	AS & A2
	Spanish	GCSE	Spanish	AS & A2
	Chinese	GCSE		
	Spanish	Entry		
	Russian	Entry		
	Japanese	Entry		

Arts	Art & Design: Fine Art	GCSE	Art	AS & A2	
	Art & Design: Short Course	GCSE			
	Drama	GCSE	Drama & Theatre Studies	AS & A2	
	Performing Arts	BTEC			
	Music	GCSE	Music	AS & A2	
Technology	D&T: Resistant Materials	GCSE	Design & Technology	AS & A2	
	D&T: Industrial Technology	GCSE	Systems & Control Technology	AS & A2	
	D&T: Electronic Products	GCSE	Engineering Applied	AS & A2	
	D&T: Food Technology	GCSE			
	D&T: Graphics Products	GCSE			
	D&T: Textile Products	GCSE	Textile Technology	AS & A2	
	Engineering 1 st Certificate	BTEC			
	Award in Digital Applications	DiDA	Computing	AS & A2	
	Cert in Digital Applications	DiDA	ICT	AS & A2	
			ICT Applied	AS & A2	
			CISCO Industry Qualification	AS & A2	
	Phys Ed & Health	Physical Education	GCSE	Physical Education	AS & A2
		Physical Education - Games	GCSE	Leisure Studies Applied	AS & A2
Health & Social Care 1 st Dip		BTEC	Health & Social Care Applied	AS & A2	
Health & Social Care 1 st Cert		BTEC			

Note:

- DiDA Diploma in Digital Applications.
 BTEC Business and Technical Education Council - The brand name that denotes all work related qualifications.
 AS & A2 The two parts of the GCE - A Levels.

Post 16 Education is managed by the Learning Skills Council and aside from staying at school there are options for students to leave and pursue qualifications in other settings. It is developing towards the seamless approach that is familiar in New Zealand.

Student Career Guidance

Student Guidance at Ashby is managed in partnership with Connexions, a national organisation which seems to have a County organisation, who provide career advice and guidance as well as an employment exchange.

Connexions Advisers are at Ashby School every day to give information, advice and guidance to students considering their career options. Each student has access to a Personal Advisor who can provide advice on:

1. Options open to them and help them decide what to do next.
2. College courses to meet their needs.
3. Any problems that they may have entering his/her chosen career.
4. Special programmes facilitating entry to work.
5. Applying for vacancies.
6. Interviews.
7. Filling in application forms.
8. Dealing with any other career-related issues.
9. Health and Lifestyle matters.

Connexions has a broad mandate in the career advice and employment field and this enables the service to continue for students after they have left school.

Lutterworth College

Lutterworth College is a co-educational senior secondary school with just over 2,000 students from Years 10 onwards. As with Ashby it is a former Grammar school that now provides its students with a comprehensive education that covers the two years of GCSE and the two years of A Level. It is a specialist Technology college.

Its curriculum offering is broadly similar to Ashby's and it too offers mainly GCSE and GCE courses with some Entry Level, BTEC and computer industry programmes.

Student Pathways

Student course choices and career planning are a central part of the organisation of the school. Its curriculum guide for new students and their parents is called "Your Pathways to Success Year 10". It is organised around a rational plan for selecting a broad pathway of study at the school based on a student's achievement levels at Key Stage 3 and on a survey of likes, interests and skills. The student works through a computer based survey called Pathfinder that collects this information and makes a range of recommendations about suitable pathways and subjects to study.

The school offers five pathways. Each pathway has a Core and Options subjects menu and a clear explanation of the areas of further education and training to which the pathway leads. There are three non vocational pathways and two vocational pathways:

1. General Majority with Language
2. General Majority with no Language
3. Separate Sciences
4. Vocational Majority
5. Vocational Practical

While the guidance system points out the most suitable pathway and indicates suitable subjects for students, the final selection rests with students and parents.

Monitoring of Students

Lutterworth has developed a profile for each student that it uses as the basis of its personal monitoring and mentoring system. The profile aspects are:

- National Predictor Grade.
- Attitude.
- Current grade level the student is working at.
- Grade the student is working towards.
- Aspirational Grade (student).
- Coursework up to date (Y/N).
- Homework up to standard (Y/N).
- Exam Grade (Grade achieved on practice exams).
- Attendance.
- Target (pathways or careers target).
- Comment.

The National Predictor Grade is calculated by a private organization contracted to the school. It predicts a grade that a student from the same background and with the same ability would get if they were at one of the country's top 25% of schools.

There are standardised school statements to guide assessment in each of profile indicators. The profile is upgraded on a regular basis but formally four times a year.

There is form class with about 25 students in each. They meet for 20 minutes on four days of the week and 40 minutes on one day. The form teachers are expected to have regular conversations with students using the profile as the basis.

On an experimental basis, students in Year 10, the first year of high school, have two adults in each form class. This has been achieved by using every adult, including non-professional staff, in the school.

There are two mentoring days a year. Mentoring days have replaced school reports to parents and the parent teacher nights. On the mentoring day each student and their parents have a twenty minute meeting with the form teacher reviewing the profile. This is in its first year of trial.

The DP responsible for the system said, "How does writing a report shift a kid's performance? A meeting and conversation is much more likely to do so."

Lutterworth is the base school within the local cluster for introducing the Diploma in Information Technology. The staff member with responsibility for developing and implementing the programme had run meetings with the staff using resources from the Diploma information website. He reported fairly strong support among the staff for the new qualification. There were some reservations concerning the:

1. Balance between a general education and a specialist one.
2. Systems for ensuring that students made well informed and considered decisions.
3. Practicalities of school clusters working smoothly together.

Providing for Student Needs in the UK

The core curriculum has a range of options within each subject that can provide broadly for the range of student need.

There is quite an extensive structure of options across the full range of academic and vocational pursuits.

While the GCSE and the GCE remain the main secondary school qualification track there are parallel options and variants that form part of a coherent network of qualifications that provide middle ability students with a wide range of choices.

The Diploma system is set up to help focus students on possible career options by introducing a programme that is based on functional skills and on a menu of learning options relating to one of the fourteen career clusters that form the fourteen Diplomas.

There is the beginnings of a rationalization of options against the career cluster areas being established as part of the Diplomas system.

There is a close relationship between GCSE and GCE and the Diplomas allowing a scale of equivalences between the qualifications to operate and allowing courses to be parts of both qualifications.

More attention is being given to student pathway planning.

United States

Curriculum Management

A national US curriculum document has never existed. Curriculum management is, essentially, a school district responsibility in the United States although since the No Child Left Behind policy the Federal Government and subsequently State Governments have been attempting to exercise some influence. Steps towards a more nationally uniform regime come up against very strong sentiments about local management.

Nonetheless, there is a broad similarity in what is taught across the country and some states are starting to mandate minimum course time in broad areas. Iowa has recently decreed that all high school students must pass four years of Language Arts and three years each of Science, Maths and Social Studies. Iowa also has put a standardized achievement test in place in an attempt to allow inter district comparison of achievement. Neighbouring Nebraska also has tests in Maths, Science, Social Studies and Writing to try and achieve the same purpose. Twenty seven states have some form of regulations requiring minimum course time, setting standardized tests or mandating minimum graduation requirements.

In the Council Bluffs Community Schools District of Iowa the district has the major say in setting the curriculum of its schools, although the schools themselves do have some control.

The main funding for education is raised by the school districts levying property taxes. This understandably gives districts the main say in the local structure of education and in its curriculum. Federal and State influence is felt via funding attached to state and federal programmes which schools may pick up.

Qualifications

Notwithstanding this rather decentralised system of curriculum management there is national uniformity in the approach to a school qualification; the High School Diploma also called Graduation. Students build up credits towards a set number by passing courses at high school. Each school district approves its own district's graduation requirements. This does vary considerably from school district to school district.

Within the graduation system students are also awarded grades for their courses. The grading system, too, is set by the school district. From the student grades a Grade Point Average is calculated for each student. This four point scale appears to be nationally uniform although the methods for arriving at it depend on the district's policies and on school practices.

The grading policies are currently an issue of moment in the US with considerable debate going on about how they are decided and on the desirability of a more coordinated national approach. There is a realisation that the lack of uniformity from classroom to classroom, from school to school and from district to district is an issue. This is behind the initiatives in many states to introduce standardized tests so as to be able to compare the achievement standards reached by students across school districts.

Tertiary Entrance

Tertiary entrance requirements are set by each individual institution. The range is considerable. Some require specific SAT test results others require the GPA plus class rankings while still other use a multi-dimensional profile.

There are two tiers of Colleges (Universities). Four year College courses that lead to undergraduate degrees and two year college courses that lead to employment qualifications. Students apply to their Colleges of choice and wait anxiously for acceptance.

Background Issues

I visited two school districts in the US and attended the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Conference.

The results of the latest PISA tests were a source of some angst. There is a reflection on what the high performing nations, this group includes New Zealand, are doing that the US should be doing. Among the issues identified are:

- School based governance.
- National curriculum standards.
- Process orientated assessment systems.
- Mixed ability teaching approaches - called differentiated teaching in the US.
- Comprehensive educational institutions.
- Strong systems for guiding and/or mentoring students and developing career aspirations.

Each school I visited was concerned about the drop out rates from College courses, especially from four year College courses. Some were very concerned that government policies and school practices were not adequately preparing students for College. In fact I was quoted drop out rates as high as 40%. If this is the case the undergraduate degree qualification rate in the US is much closer to the New Zealand level than the entry rates to tertiary education suggest.

Concerns about graduation rates were not couched in terms of tougher assessment regimes although concern about national coherence of these was certainly a theme of many discussions. Rather graduation rate discussions focussed more on developing dynamic approaches to student pathways planning, on producing clearer standards of expectation in every aspect of school life and on curriculum structures. Curriculum structures are being talked about as needing, to have a closer relationship to a wider range of career futures, to cater for a wider ability range of students while remaining challenging.

Student management was a concern addressed in several ASCD Conference workshops. Whereas five years ago this appeared to be a stand alone issue now it appears to have developed significant linkages with concerns about student pathways planning and curriculum structures. A number of initiatives that are arising out of discussions of meta-curriculum programmes have a focus on values, relationships and broader life skills matters as part of a wider approach to improving student success.

Middletown Area School “Pathways to Pride” programme

Middletown Area School District has one high school, one middle school and three primary schools. The high school has just over 700 students of whom 22% belong to ethnic minorities. 29% of students come from low income families.

77% of students graduate from high school. The destinations of the students are:

4 year College courses	42%
2 year College courses	38%
Employment	12%
Military	8%

The District has a schools wide programme of career exploration that leads to the “Pathways to Pride” programme in the high school.

The ‘pathways’ part of the programme is the selection by each student of a pathway to follow through school. A pathway is a broad cluster of related career fields. There are five pathways each containing several clusters of careers:

Arts and Communication

- Performing Arts
- Visual Arts
- Publishing Arts

Business, Finance and Information Technology

- Marketing, Sales and Service
- Finance
- Information Technology
- Business Management

Engineering and Industrial Technology

- Construction and Architecture
- Manufacturing
- Engineering and Engineering Technology
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

Human Services

- Counselling and Personal Care
- Education
- Law, Public safety and Government
- Hospitality and Tourism

Science and Health

- Health Science
- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Science, Technology and Maths

The ‘pride’ part of the programme is an approach to school values which is based around the acronym PRIDE:

P	Perseverance
R	Respect
I	Integrity
D	Discipline
E	Excellence

Planning

Students are taken through a survey that helps them identify their skills, attributes and interests. On the basis of this profile students are asked to identify their primary and secondary pathways. Through the four years of high school to graduation they follow the course of study related to their primary pathway. Transfers between pathways are possible.

Courses

In practice the only difference between the pathways is in the cluster of optional subjects, 'electives', that is attached to each pathway. Within each core subject, English, Maths, Social Studies, and Science there are choices of courses. While the core menu is the same for each pathway the choices that students make are somewhat influenced by their career path choices. Phys Ed is also part of the core. A world language is compulsory in the first two years and then optional with electives in the last two.

Students are encouraged to participate in work experience programmes or internships in the career areas in which they are interested. These take place in the final year and count credits towards graduation.

Tracking Students

Each student has a personal career portfolio and academic planner. This is a file folder in which the students keep:

- Letters from school about their activities.
- Letters from employers and sports coaches.
- Their resume.
- Awards and honours.
- Important test results.
- Career exploration results:
 - Results of job shadows and Internships.
 - Interviews of people in field of career interest.
 - Career descriptions of interest.
 - Results from personality and interest inventories.
- Community service learning projects.
- List of school activities and positions held.
- Grade transcripts.
- News articles about you or your team or any activity you in which you participated.
- Information about Universities, Polytechs and training courses.

The cover of the file folder has a checklist of pathway planning and review steps that each student must go through in each year of high school.

Council Bluffs Community Schools District, Council Bluffs, Iowa

Council Bluffs is a city on the western edge of Iowa on the banks of the Missouri River opposite Omaha, Nebraska. The school district covers most of the city and has about 10,000 students in:

- 14 primary schools
- 2 junior high schools
- 2 high schools
- 1 careers centre
- 1 alternative high school

About 3,000 students are in the four high school institutions. Each of the high schools, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson, has over 1300 students, there are about 250 students in the alternative programme at Kanesville High School and about 150 students from the two high schools take some of their programme at the Harmon Tucker Career Centre.

Graduation Requirements

Overall Requirement: Completion of 48 credits in grades 9 - 12

1 credit is earned by passing each year-long course.

Social Studies: 6 credits required

US History (2)

Government (1)

World History (1)

Economics (1)

One of the following: (1)

World History

Sociology

Psychology

English: 8 credits required

(Two in each grade year)

Math: 6 credits required

Algebra 1* (2)

Geometry* (2)

One of the following: (2)

Algebra 2

Math Analysis

Science: 6 credits required

Physical Science (2)

Biology (2)

One of the following: (2)

Chemistry

Physics

Advanced Earth Science

Human Biology

Environmental Science

Physical Education: 4 credits required

Must be enrolled in a minimum of one class per semester and successfully complete a minimum of four credits, unless excused.

Electives 18 credits required

There are a range of subjects in areas such as Business, Technology and the Arts similar to New Zealand from which students can select courses.

GPA

A GPA is calculated for each student based on the grades they receive in each course. The grades are A to F; F being a fail. Credits are awarded for grades A to D. The GPA is a grade and credit weighted calculation as it was in New Zealand. The GPA scale is 0 to 4.0.

Honours rolls are established for students with GPAs between 4.0 and 3.8 (Gold) and between 3.79 and 3.50 (silver).

Annual Promotion

In order to be promoted to a successive grade level, students must meet minimally established progressive credit total requirements:

10 th Grade	12 credits
11 th Grade	24 credits
12 th Grade	36 credits

Students that fail to make these levels can catch up in summer school or may be held back until the threshold number of credits is reached.

District Issues

The city is a working class community similar in socio-economic profile, though not in ethnic profile, to Glen Innes. The key issues in the district are:

1. Raising overall graduation rates.
2. Raising the levels of self belief in students.
3. Continuing the establishment of robust pathway planning for students.
4. Strengthening the vocational pathways programmes already established.

In these respects this community bears striking resemblances to similar communities in New Zealand.

Self Belief

Thomas Jefferson High School has begun a campaign to raise student belief in their ability to succeed. It is called "Undefeated". While it was the brainchild of a staff member it is organised to be substantially run by students. It was begun to counter the perception common among students in the district that they couldn't win. It counters this by promoting an "undefeated state of mind" and celebrating student success.

The campaigners have run events and produced posters and T Shirts promoting the message. So far it has been concentrating on the social and sporting side of school life but has recently begun to move into the academic.

Student Pathway Planning

In Year 8, the final year of junior high school, students start a systematic programme of career planning and review by attending high school orientation, learning what help and support is available through the schools' career and counselling centres and taking an on-line survey of their interests and aptitudes. This survey is part of the services provided by Bridges Transitions Inc, one of a number of private companies involved in on-line career planning and college preparation. Students log on to a package of career planning tools called Choices Explorer. This is a comprehensive site which enables students to follow up their test results with possible career fields of interest and to match these to recommendations for courses of study.

The high schools follow up this initial exploration and planning with a systematic programme of review, further planning, further surveys and testing, more career exploration activities, various college and employment preparation activities and regular discussions between students and counselling staff each year until graduation.

The coordination of this programme resides in the counselling departments of each high school. The staff commitment in these areas is significant. The two high schools each have about four full time staff committed to career and personal counselling.

Vocational Pathways in School Programmes

Work has begun on relating career fields and their associated clusters of careers to courses in the high schools. This has resulted in the development of Career Academies and Career Technical Programmes. These programmes are designed to lead students toward entry into various career clusters. Some of the programmes are taught at the regular high schools while some, those needing more specialised equipment and facilities, require part time attendance at the Harmon Tucker Career Centre where the teachers are actually staff members of the local polytechnic (2 Year College - Iowa Western).

Programmes at the Tucker Centre

- Medical Health Science
- Computer Networking Technology
- Automotive Technology
- Early Childhood Careers
- Hospitality and Culinary Management

Programmes at the high schools include

- Information Technology
- Pre-engineering
- Educational Academy
- Business Marketing and Information Management
- Computer Education
- Family and Human Services
- Industrial Technology

The district's educational service centre hosts one programme: Electronic Media Studies

Westside High School, Westside School District, Omaha, Nebraska

Westside High School is the Westside District's sole high school. The Westside District is an affluent area of Omaha city. It has 6,000 students attending ten primary schools, one middle school and one high school. Westside High School has a student roll of just over 2,000 of whom about 30% come to the school from outside the district. Its ethnic composition is European 86%, Asian 3.5%, Hispanic 4%, American Indian 1% and African American 5.5%. It has a 92.5% graduation rate.

This is one of the best designed, most comfortably appointed and best equipped public schools I have seen. The District has clearly persuaded its residents to invest substantially in education.

Approaches to School Organisation and Programmes

It is also a school with a long standing innovative programme. Currently this innovation has the following main components:

1. All students carry district owned laptops.
2. The day is scheduled using a variety of combinations of 20 minute periods.
3. Students are taught in a variety of settings from large group (100+) lectures, through regular classes and practical sessions to individual tuition.
4. Each student has up to half the weekly timetable free for independent study time.
5. Each teacher also has about a 0.5 class load.
6. There is a huge study centre in which teacher has an open plan office and in which there also tables for student work. Teachers are expected to be available to students for assistance and tutorials.

The school believes:

"At a time in our society when the age of majority is eighteen years of age, we must help students develop self-reliance. To enhance this development we at Westside are committed to aid each student to learn to effectively use his/her independent study time."

The above innovations have been in place in the school for forty years and are very well supported by staff, students and parents. The school states that their College drop out rate is extremely low as a direct result of their programme.

Graduation Requirements

There is a credit requirement for graduation expressed in credit-hours with an additional requirement of credit-hours to graduate with a commendation.

Students must also complete several additional tasks to qualify for Graduation:

1. Pass competency tests in reading, writing, maths and consumerism
2. Complete a senior project,
3. Meet a Service Learning requirement,
4. Complete a Future Plan Portfolio
5. Gather information about themselves concerning their own employability skills.

The curriculum of the school is broadly similar to that at Council Bluffs. The school underpins all its activities with these objectives of having students demonstrate competency in:

1. Problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making.
2. Communication and group interaction.
3. Verbal, quantitative, scientific and technological literacy.
4. Thinking and expressing themselves creatively and responding to the creative works of others.
5. Understanding the heritage of the United States and the skills of participating in a democratic society.
6. Living successfully in a multicultural, global society.
7. Enhancing and sustaining self-esteem through personal honesty, adequate knowledge of self, dedication to the work ethic and in maintenance of mental and physical health.
8. Self-improvement through life long learning.
9. The personal and social skills necessary to function successfully in school and in life.

Student Pathway Planning

The high school has ten full time counselling staff supported by two secretarial staff. There is a specialist career counsellor in the team. They are responsible for the normal range of counselling matters as well as for all aspects of student pathway planning including career awareness and the associated academic planning.

There is a systematic approach taken to this with all students. There is an on-line career inventory available to students that is similar to that operating in Council Bluffs. It too matches student interest, skills and aptitudes to career fields and suggests suitable subjects for inclusion in the optional part of student programmes.

Every student has a Future Plan folder. Keeping this up to date and completing all the steps required to build it up is part of graduation. It is regularly reviewed in Guidance classes which are a nine weeks programme of 40 minute classes. It also reviewed individually each year when course selections are made for the following year.

The school has vertical form groupings in which it is expected that form teachers will review student plans and progress.

Parents have on line access to student progress reports which are updated every quarter and to the student's career folder.

Students in their final year get extra attention to ensure that their plans are up to date and that they are meeting graduation requirements.

General Summary

Unified Secondary Qualification Systems

In the countries I visited qualifications are being rationalised into coherent systems. There may still be a number of qualifications available but the ability to move between them has been facilitated.

The US is unique in having the one qualification, the High School Diploma. Some of its able students can take advanced placement courses which give them credits for College programmes. But no other qualifications are available in the schools.

Ireland has a single qualification system with two steps. There is the one qualification available at Year 11, Junior Certificate. At Year 13 there is a main qualification, Leaving Certificate which has a variant, Applied, that allows for some career and work exploration, and a variant, Vocational, focussed on employment.

The UK has a system which is currently becoming more unified. It has had a range of school based qualifications available which have constituted parallel pathways in the past. Recently these parallel systems have been unified via a system of equivalences which have linked most qualifications to the GCSE / GCE main pathway. The Diplomas proposal when first developed would have replaced all the UK secondary qualifications with four levels of Diplomas which would have been a system similar to New Zealand's NCEA. However as the Diplomas proposal has been implemented it is yet another parallel qualification structure for UK students which has a formula for creating equivalence with the GCSE / GCE pathway.

National Assessment Points

New Zealand is not alone in having three separate points at which its senior secondary students are 'examined'.

The UK has three points of assessment for its two major qualifications. The first point is at the end of Year 11 when the GCSE assesses the previous two years of study. The GCE (A Levels) is awarded in full at the end of Year 13 although it is assessed in two parts at the end of each year of study. The first year results are called AS and can stand alone. The new Diplomas are being introduced to schools in the next academic year at three levels. While the Diplomas do not involve formal examinations as such, the implication is a continuous, but diverse, assessment system with critical points in each of the three years.

Ireland has two qualification points. At the end of Year 11 students take the Junior Certificate examination. They take the Leaving Certificate examination, or meet the requirements of its variants, at the end of Year 13. They also have the option of a Transition year between Years 11 and 12. Assessment of this programme occurs in a wide variety of ways but does not include examinations.

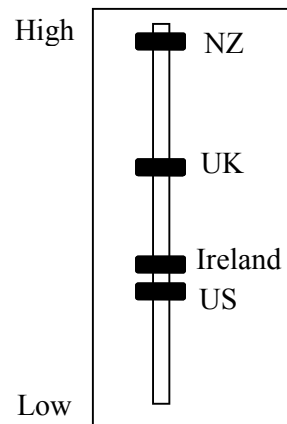
Although the US appears to have just the one national assessment point, it could be argued that they have continuous assessment. The US High School Diploma, earned via graduation, is built up over the last four years of high school; students having to pass each course to accumulate the credit total required to graduate.

Curriculum

The tension at senior secondary levels between broad, general education and specialising education is being felt to different degrees in all countries. While each country speaks of a commitment to a broad, general curriculum the extent to which this is reflected in school systems varies considerably from country to country. In practice the extent of the balance is influenced by statements about core curriculum and by the range of subjects available for student choice in the senior school.

At Year 11 the amount of the weekly programme that is core curriculum in the four countries under consideration is approximately:

US	85%
UK	60%
Ireland	50%
New Zealand	50%



Choice of courses for inclusion in Qualifications

The practical commitment to a broad, general education is strongest in the US where despite the absence of a national curriculum there is a significant level of uniformity of view about what constitutes a compulsory core curriculum.

All countries are experiencing pressure from governments and communities to prepare students better for their post school pathways. Inevitably this expectation produces a tendency to 'train' students for tertiary programmes, apprenticeships and employment. Thus a great deal of thought has been going in to ways of accomplishing this without sacrificing the commitment to a broad, general education. There are three considerations developing as this position is resolved into practical school programmes:

1. How to express the core curriculum
2. The development of 'options'.
3. The growth of systems to help students make choices.

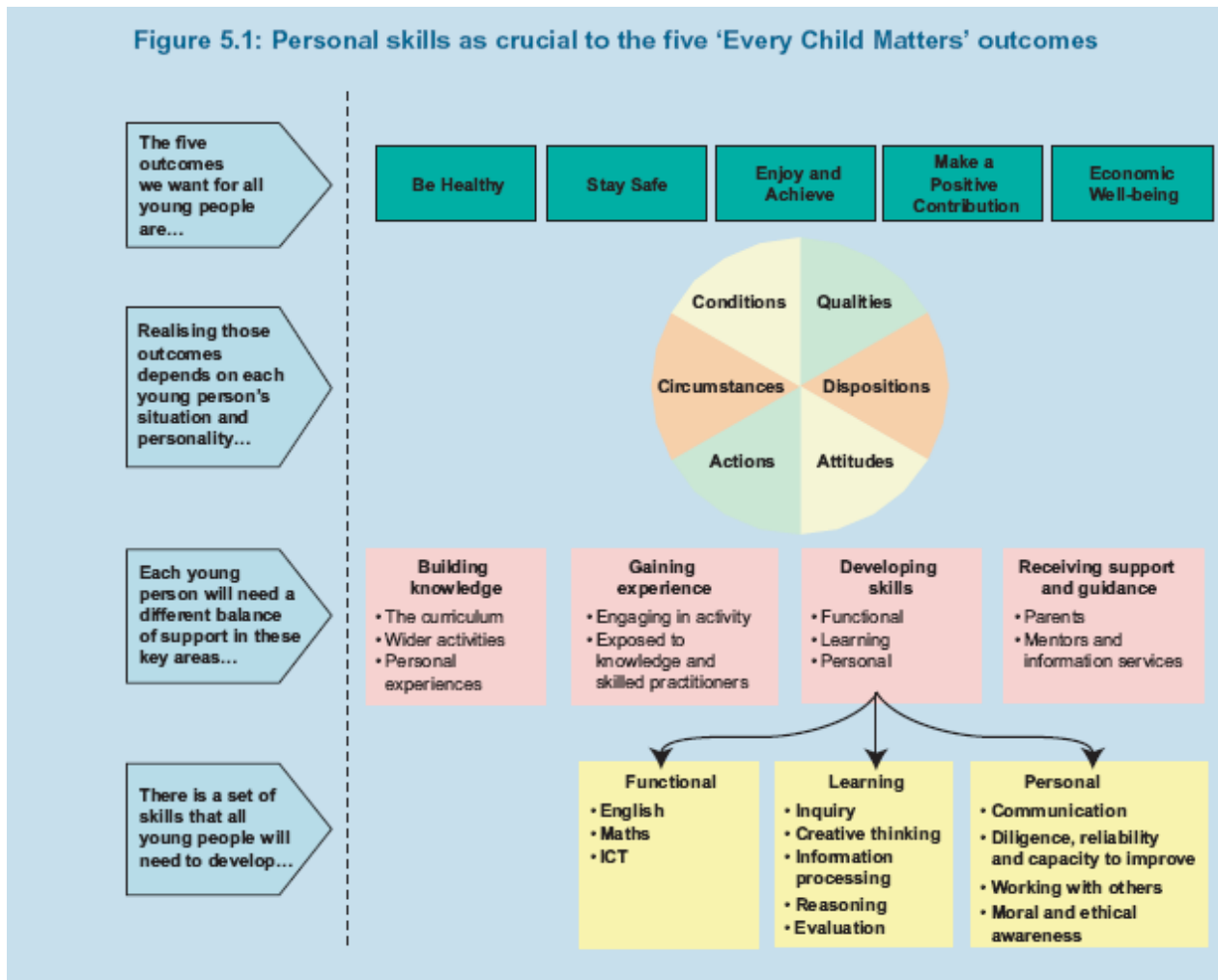
The Core Curriculum

Until recently most of the debate about broad, general education has been expressed in terms of subject curriculums. The question focuses largely on which subjects are core subjects. To some extent it also focuses on the skills and content knowledge related to these core subjects. In New Zealand this debate has an additional dimension; competencies. This development may be described as the evolution of a meta-curriculum; a curriculum where the central specifications of the core underpins all subjects. In New Zealand the meta-curriculum is expressed in terms of Values and Competencies. The Competencies are:

Thinking
Using Language, Symbols and Text
Managing Self
Relating to Others
Participating and Contributing.

The same direction of development is now being seen in the UK where the Diplomas proposals have started to develop a basic platform of Functional Skills, Learning Skills and Personal Skills. These have not replaced the Key Stages of the present UK National Curriculum but they will sit along side them and be integrated into them particularly at Key Stage 4. There is considerable work going on to define assessable standards for the Functional Skills. 'Functional' skills are described as the "practical skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) that allow individuals to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life." The evolution of the core meta-curriculum in the UK is summarised in the diagram below.

Figure 5.1: Personal skills as crucial to the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes



Source: UK Dfes White Paper - "14-19 Education and Skills"

In Ireland the curriculum is still subject centred and I did not discern much discussion about generic skills and competencies in the system. Subject curriculums are a mixture of knowledge, skill and concept specification. There is concern about generic skills and competencies but it has not reached the level of development present in New Zealand and the UK.

In the US there is little discussion of meta-curriculum. In fact states in the US are beginning to take a hand in the curriculum debate, which was previously seen as the preserve of school districts, by giving consideration to specifying the number of years of study of subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies required for students to graduate. In individual school districts some elements of the meta-curriculum are included in graduation requirements as separate programmes such as Thinking Skills, Life Skills and so on.

While both New Zealand and the UK still have mandatory curriculums at Year 9/10 it remains to be seen whether the expression of core requirements at Years 11 and above will shift from subject specification to a meta-curriculum specification. I detect reservations about making this step because the commitment to a broad, general education is still seen as requiring more from English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Phys Ed than the basic competencies expressed in the meta-curriculum. There is, in other words, still a strong commitment to broad, general education which professional educators see to be at risk if the development of the meta-curriculum de-contextualises these skills from specific subjects and allows them to be subsumed into the fabric of every and any subject placed in a school curriculum.

I think the stage that both the UK and New Zealand are at is to move our thinking about curriculum structure towards the meta-curriculum ideas while retaining the current commitment to core and optional subjects. The expectation is that while some meta-curriculum skills may be nurtured and developed in particular core subjects they must be explicitly expressed, taught and developed by all subjects.

Options

Only New Zealand has an almost limitless capacity for the development of option subjects in its schools. This comes from the National Qualification Framework and the unique flexibility that the NCEA gives New Zealand schools.

Ireland has a restricted number of options in its central qualification, the Leaving Certificate. However in its two variants which both have the aims of allowing students to explore career pathways, careers have been grouped in families of related careers in order to allow student to develop some familiarity with possible career choices. This has been accompanied by some specific modules of study relating to preparation for the world of work.

In the UK there has been a wide range of subjects gradually introduced into the GCSE programme. In addition school students have access to quite specialised and work specific qualifications via the BTEC menu. However the Diplomas have taken a middle path and they too are based on clusters of related careers called in the UK system Domains. Students involved in a particular Diploma take optional courses designed to provide an introduction to the range of careers involved in the domain. There is an opportunity to explore aspects of interest to a student more fully via work place exploration and the extended project.

This idea of optional subjects providing general and broad introductions to career fields is also characteristic of those systems in the US which are focussed on providing pathways to tertiary education and careers for students. In Council Bluffs the Career Academies and the Career Technical programmes provided courses that introduced students to fundamental concepts, skills and knowledge that applied to career fields. In the very successful Medical Health Science programme there were students who intended going to medical school alongside students who were interested in being dental hygienists. Middletown Area High School had grouped its optional structure into five broad career pathways.

The general tendency then is to respond to the tension between a broad, general education and the need to point students at future careers by generating optional course structures that are related to broad families of related careers.

Student Choice

None of the countries that I visited have a system for compulsorily directing students into pathways. In every case there is a system which at its simplest is one of student choice of subject. All countries have pre-requisite systems which are generally more in the nature of guidelines than unbending rules. All teachers and principals I spoke to were clear about the problems of mandatory systems for directing students into courses.

The need, though, to provide a framework to help students and parents make appropriate choices has become central to student course selection processes.

In Ireland there are basic career guidance services but the Transition Year is an innovative and unique way of assisting students to make effective and appropriately challenging plans for the coming years.

In Leicestershire students, in addition to school guidance staff, had access to Personal Advisors via the Connexions agency. At Lutterworth Community College students were encouraged to develop a future plan and a sophisticated system of progress monitoring and feedback was being introduced.

In the US all the schools I visited and heard about were implementing systems that enabled students to develop future plans and to review and monitor them regularly. They all had a similar approach:

1. Exposure to information about career possibilities.
2. A systematic way of developing a student profile of skills, interest and attributes and relating this to families of careers.
3. The development of a plan based on these career interests.
4. Information relating career interests to school programmes.
5. Relationships with workplaces to enable student exploration of career interests.
6. Involvement of families with future plans.
7. Regular systematic review of future plans by students and school staff.

The guidance departments of the schools that I visited were substantially resourced. The staffing levels were about four times those that are generally present in New Zealand.

Providing for Middle Ability Students

All the countries that I visited provided in some ways for middle ability students.

In Ireland the Leaving Certificate can be taken at two different levels, Higher and Ordinary. One of the variants of the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate - Applied does allow students to explore career options and the world of work while taking regular Leaving Certificate subjects. The Transition Year appears to appeal to a wide range of student ability and its flexible teaching styles and the wide range of non-examination assessment instruments particularly appeals to middle ability students. They seem to get a lot from the collective approaches to many aspects of the programme and to the safe way quite demanding challenges are presented to them. In terms of placing challenging programmes in front of middle ability students, and giving them good information and the time to clarify goals, the transition year concept was by far the best I saw.

In the UK the GCSE canon of subjects is aimed at a range of abilities and there are a number of options that appeal to middle ability students in areas such as business, art and design, tourism, service sector employment and applied languages. The development of vocationally orientated programmes related to clusters of careers rather than a particular career at both GCSE and GCE levels is providing pathways for middle ability students into Year 13. The Diplomas are another step in developing career oriented opportunities for study which by clustering related careers that include the skilled, the administrative, the servicing and the professional into seventeen domains provides realistic vocational challenges for middle ability students. Students also have access to BTEC qualifications which are specialist qualifications for a number of skilled occupations. These parallel pathways are linked by a series of equivalences with the mainstream secondary school pathway of GCSE and GCE. They also use GCSE and GCE programmes in their structures. At first glance the UK secondary qualification structure is a complex system but the increasing linkages between pathways are producing a system with considerable flexibility.

In the US the High School Diploma system has always been aimed at having the majority of students graduate from high school. It is a system that promotes the broad education required by all. In that sense it can be seen as a system designed for middle ability students. High ability students are provided for by the Honours systems that exist in many high schools and by the provision of accelerated programmes of studies. In many schools these programmes are separate courses. More targeted provision is provided by the option subjects or elective programmes. However these constitute a relatively smaller fraction of programmes than is the case in New Zealand.

What is emerging, perhaps more strongly in the US than elsewhere, are programmes that are aimed at students developing well thought out future plans. From the start of high school students identify their interests and skills, explore career options, explore the world of work and match their ideas to school programmes of study. Student progress and the evolution of their plans is monitored regularly. This pathways programme is usually managed by a well staffed Counselling Department.

In summary

1. There is still a strong commitment to broad general education in secondary schools.
2. Core programmes often contain variations of core subjects aimed at two or three different levels of ability.
3. Option subjects are becoming more closely related to career clusters rather than particular careers.
4. Option courses and programmes often involve aspects of career and work exploration.
5. There is a growing recognition of the importance of the meta-curriculum.
6. Student pathways, future plans, are being developed and monitored in a systematic way for all students in a number of schools.

The New Zealand Context

Curriculum Structure

We have the most progressive curriculum structure of the four countries that I visited.

Up to Year 11 the Learning Areas framework strikes a balance of knowledge, skills and conceptual development while allowing schools to respond to the needs of their students. It has handled the question of a national curriculum in a de-centralised school administrative structure well. The meta-curriculum aspects covered in values and competencies tie it together so that it balances a coherent statement of competencies on a platform of carefully constructed subjects. Up to Year 11 it is, indeed, a balanced, general education.

The challenges to our system begin at Year 11. Most schools maintain a core curriculum of English, Maths and Science at Year 11 and English at Year 12. Actually the only rules about the core are those implied in the conditions for the award of NCEA Level 1; ie an English course that will deliver the 8 Literacy credits and a Maths course that will deliver 8 Numeracy credits at Level 1.

Beyond this, the full menu of standards on the National Qualifications Framework is available for the construction of courses. There is but one restraint, the restricted range of standards at Level 3 that lead to the University Entrance qualification en route to NCEA Level 3 as well as the requirement to have 4 writing and 4 reading credits at Level 2.

Not surprisingly over the last few years we have seen the development of many alternative courses in schools that call on the more vocationally orientated standards.

The system was designed to provide for the full range of student ability within the one certification qualification. The pressure on schools to provide for the needs of their students as well as to lift the NCEA pass rates provides very powerful incentives to develop courses that students will pass. This is the pressure to dumb down. It's not the individual standards that are being dumbed down but the pressure on course design and curriculum offerings in schools that can dumb down a school's programme overall.

Qualification Structure

No country that I visited is developing a system that only ranks students or is purely designed for the University bound student. Most countries are focussed on variants of standards based systems. There is an explicit commitment to the need to educate as many students as possible to as high a level as possible. That is not to say that national systems are incapable of producing rankings or that there are not aspects of testing available that will rank students. Each country has such systems.

New Zealand's qualification system is the most flexible I saw both in terms of the way credit is accumulated in relation to student progress and in terms of the subject matter that can be called upon in gaining a qualification.

The standards specifications for Achievement Standards are demanding particularly at the Merit and Excellence level. Indeed it is considerably harder to earn a full house of Excellence grades in a course than it was to earn A grades in whole subjects in earlier times. The Scholarship examination has added an extremely demanding and very competitive top layer on the traditional school courses. An NCEA Level 3 Certificate is quite an accomplishment.

The width of the Framework means that schools can teach very elementary courses or highly

specialized vocational courses to students from Year 11 onwards. This can conflict with the general aim of a broad, general education system.

Indiscriminate pressure on general measures of gross accomplishment like overall NCEA certification rates place inappropriate pressure on schools to design courses which are easy for students to pass.

The intersection of these two pressures encourages a system in which there is a strong disincentive to placing demanding and challenging courses in front of students, even at a range of ability levels.

Student Pathways

Systematic and comprehensive approaches to student pathway planning in New Zealand secondary schools are rare. There is no longer staffing explicitly for Careers. There is some for Guidance but traditionally this has not been seen as including careers advice. Schools have to create the staffing for careers education positions from the general pool provided. Most use as a guide the small number of hours formerly provided as a separate allowance. There is a very small salary allowance payable to the teacher with careers advice responsibilities. Some training is available for Careers advisors. Nearly all is focussed on careers awareness rather than on techniques for student pathways planning. To support careers work there are a number of programmes:

1. The Careers Service provides quite a few online resources including an online profile and planning tool called Pathfinder.
2. TKI is a portal for a number of careers related web sites.
3. STAR funding provides resources for schools to develop vocationally orientated options programmes.
4. Gateway, recently available to higher decile schools, provides substantial funds for students to explore career interest and gain NCEA credits.
5. Most recently CPaBL, a framework with funding for schools to use to revitalise career programmes in schools.

The CPaBL programme offers schools the ability to review and strengthen school career programmes. The material provided for schools is very general and is afflicted with large amounts of bureaucratic work, but it does promote laudable, although general, goals. Only its outcomes statement for students makes clear that it considers a student plan as an important outcome. It includes:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| a) Developing self-awareness | Demonstrate awareness of changing influences, interests, strengths, values and identity development. |
| b) Becoming aware of opportunities | Explore aspects of identities, making links between life and learning.
Demonstrate skills in locating and interpreting information about pathways. |
| c) Making decisions and planning | Making appropriate subject choices (to pursue interests but keep options open).
Learning how to develop plans and set goals.
Understanding the need to be flexible and revisit choices.
Exploring work, training, and study opportunities. |
| d) Taking action | Gathering and maintaining relevant CV information.
Acquiring relevant communication and interview skills required to apply for further study, training, work.
<i>Taking action towards goals identified in an LCP.</i> |

Source NZ Ministry of Education

My sabbatical focus on middle ability students has led me to focus on student pathway planning as an important tool in working with all students but particularly middle ability students who are more characterised by uncertain plans for the future than other ability groups.

My starting point is student focus and motivation rather than careers education. While careers education is a substantial part of a student pathway plan it is not all of it. It is in a broad sense an IEP for each student.

While I was away the Government announced School Plus. It said (my emphasis);

“To achieve the *Schools Plus* goal, the government wishes to see:

- *All young people assisted in developing a personal education plan when they enter secondary school, and continuing to refine the plan to map their next steps.*
- *Students able to connect what they’re doing at school to what they want to do as a career. They will know about the options available to them, and some may choose to combine workplace or tertiary learning with their schooling.*
- All students who leave school before the age of 18 connected to high-quality training and education that suits their needs and abilities.
- All under 18-year-olds in full-time work participating in further training or education.
- Non-government organisations, families, whānau, iwi and communities providing a range of services that support young people to achieve well in education or training.

Guiding principles

The government has established the following guiding principles.

- All young people should be *actively and willingly engaged* in education, skills or other structured learning, relevant to their needs and abilities, at least until the age of 18;
- *Schools are the first point of responsibility for ensuring students are engaged in an appropriate programme of learning;*
- Strong partnerships with employers, tertiary education organisations, parents, families, whānau, iwi and communities will be essential to the success of *Schools Plus*;
- *All students will have an education plan. This will be developed when they enter secondary schooling, continue to be refined and map the pathways to their next destination;*
- *Flexibility in education pathways and support services should be available for all students, reflecting the concept of personalising learning;*
- As students near the age of 18, they will have increasing flexibility and say in decisions about how and where they learn;
- *To the extent that students are required to participate in education and training, they will have a range of options available in line with their needs and circumstances.”*

Source: www.schoolsplus.govt.nz bold, italicised text mine

I have arrived back in New Zealand with a clear view that this is a good strategy which is already bearing fruit in various places in the United States. I particularly support the aspects that I have placed in bold-italicized type.

Issues for New Zealand

Student Pathway Plans

The development of a systematic approach to producing student pathway plans, personal education plans, in all New Zealand secondary schools is probably the best next step we can take to lift achievement for all students but particularly for our middle ability students.

Many of the elements we need are already present. Some re-orientation and greater clarity of the goals of CPaBL would provide a good platform from which to start. A review, and possibly an adjustment of the alignment, of the resources we currently have in the Careers Service, TKI, STAR, and Gateway would provide many of the services and a considerable amount of the infrastructure needed by schools to support a pathway plan for every student.

If the meta-curriculum elements of our national curriculum are important then ways of including these aspects in student pathway planning need to be explored.

However schools will need more staffing to ensure that individual pathway plans have real effect. They need to be systematically established, involve the whole range of school activities, involve families, be linked to school reporting and progress monitoring systems and regularly reviewed. Schools need to acquire and keep the skills required to develop these plans and to ensure that staff have the continuously up-to-date knowledge needed to keep student and parents properly informed.

Staff also need the time to do the work. In the US this work is expected of teachers who generally have about the same non-contact time as New Zealand teachers but they are supported by guidance departments about four times as big as those in New Zealand. A school of about 700 students would have four full time staff involved in all aspects of guidance including pathways planning and review.

Curriculum and Qualifications

School curriculum should remain committed to providing a broad, general platform for the education of senior secondary students. In my view this means;

- a meta-curriculum of values and competencies underpinning,
- a core set of subjects which provide a few broad ranges of level of difficulty within them and are supported by;
- a set of options that relate to broad clusters of careers

There should be a dynamic reflection of the sum of student pathways in the overall curriculum structure in the school.

If this curriculum plan is to provide for student need and to place realistic challenges in front of students then instruments of public evaluation of schools must rise above the simplistic and negative influences of gross NCEA pass rates. Schools have to have the room to take informed risks as well as being publicly accountable. At the moment the Review Office lacks the sophisticated evaluation tools required to provide the right incentives. The current result is a powerful incentive to dumb down programmes to increase gross NCEA pass rates.

Recommendations for Kaipara

Student Pathway Planning

We should immediately work out how we can develop pathway plans for each student.

This matches an identified objective of the Strategic Plan adopted in 2007.

It is also a goal of the new Schools Plus initiative.

Curriculum Management

We should continue to develop our meta-curriculum initiatives of Habits of Mind and Thinking Skills.

We should also give thought to the ways in which the other meta curriculum aspects, the values and competencies, of the revised national curriculum are implemented at school.

The College curriculum structure should be reviewed against these three principles:

1. a meta-curriculum of values and competencies underpinning,
2. a core set of subjects which provide a few broad ranges of level of difficulty within them and are supported by;
3. a set of options that relate to broad clusters of careers.

Attractive Ideas

These ideas attracted my attention while I was away. I believe we should think through their applicability to Kaipara.

Lutterworth's Parent Meetings

Instead of parent reports and parent teacher meetings Lutterworth Community School runs a student plan system combined with quarterly monitoring of performance indicators and reviews the plan and the progress at a six monthly meeting of parents, student and form teacher.

Ireland's Transition Year

At the end of Year 11 students have a choice: Do the two year Leaving Certificate or take a year out and do a wide ranging programme of curriculum and career exploration combined with a wide range of group and personal challenges.

Council Bluffs' Career Centre

Students in the Council Bluffs secondary schools can enter a Careers Academy and take programmes which introduce them to a particular career cluster. The Career Centre is a separate institution staffed by polytech teachers and provides equipment and facilities beyond those available at the regular high schools. The programmes dovetail with the home high school timetable.

Middletown's Course structure

Middletown Area High School has a strong student pathways programme which is linked to a five pathway school curriculum organisation. There are also several meta-curriculum elements involved as well links with local businesses and employers.

Westside's Timetable Structure

Westside High School is committed to teaching its students the skills of independent learning. The meta-curriculum features in school organisation and in graduation requirements.

Westside High School has a curriculum plan for students that includes a very flexibly used modular timetable based on 20 minute blocks of time. Their teachers teach half loads and their students attend classes half the time. Each student has a school laptop. The school has a huge study centre in which all staff have open plan offices and in which there is plenty of space for students to study. Staff are expected to be available in the study centre to work with students one to one or in small groups.

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