

Development of the Levels of Progression

Process of Development

Stage 1

October 2002 – May 2003

CCEA brought together a number of working groups made up of curriculum and assessment staff, practising teachers and ELB advisers to develop a new assessment framework which would take into account the increased emphasis on skills in the revised NI curriculum.

The levels developed were based on a Plan-Do-Review model.

In January 2003, CCEA made recommendations to DE on assessment at Key Stages 1 and 2. Proposals included annual reporting in Literacy (Talking and Listening, Reading, Writing, Numeracy and ICT), using a scale of Levels 1-5. DE accepted these recommendations in principle.

Stage 2

September 2003 – March 2005

In September 2003, proposals for the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum included assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT using an 8-level scale.

At around the same time, a decision was made to cross-reference the Skills Levels of Progression to the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and to extend the work to cover Key Stage 3. Several formats were proposed and one agreed to carry work forward. This format combined a short level description (based on Plan-Do-Review) with a non-statutory expansion cross-referenced to the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

Development at this stage involved CCEA C&A staff, Key Stage 1 and 2 moderators, Key Stage 3 IT moderators, the English Subject Officer, 3 to 4 KS3 Maths teachers and Professor Carol McGuinness of QUB for the thinking skills perspective.

In December 2003, CCEA recommendations to DE re assessment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 included reporting progress in Communication, Using Mathematics and ICT using levels of progression. These recommendations were accepted in July 2004.

July-September 2004 - Extensive feedback was sought from the Literacy, Numeracy and ICT advisers in each ELB, from ETI and from Key Stage 3 Chief Markers.

In October 2004, 30 Primary teachers received training on levels as part of the Pupil Profile trial. Likewise, in February 2005, 15 Key Stage 3 teachers received training on levels as part of the Pupil Profile Trial.

From November 2004 – March 2005, the levels of progression were trialled with 50 Primary and 30 post-primary teachers and an evaluation report was produced.

Stage 3

April 2005 - September 2005

Feedback from the Levels trials and other trial work indicated that the levels were too detailed and unwieldy. Teachers were unsure how to assess 'Plan-Do-Review'. While they liked the idea of cross-referencing the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities, they found this confusing for assessment purposes.

It was proposed (within CCEA) to blend the levels in various ways. For example:

- To collapse Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing into one Literacy/Communication description
- To lose discrete ICT by combining it with Literacy/Communication and Numeracy/Using Mathematics
- To create one 'big level' which would combine all three.

However, CCEA Council/DE indicated that they still wished reporting to include specific categories such as Talking and Listening, Reading, Writing and ICT.

At around this time, DE also indicated that the terminology 'Communication' and 'Using Mathematics' would be used throughout all key stages.

In September 2005, 15 Key Stage 3 teachers received training on levels as part of the Accreditation Trial.

Stage 4

October 2005 – August 2006

Development work continued on the Levels of Progression, simplifying them by stripping out references to TS and PC and to 'Plan-Do-Review'.

At this stage, it was proposed that the levels would be non-statutory and used as a teacher tool for planning, assessing and making qualitative comments on the Pupil Profile report.

Statutory requirements were identified which would provide a basic definition of the skills (especially ICT which had no area of learning to define minimum content). The now non-statutory levels of progression would provide a continuum of development.

It was intended that additional guidance would be developed to:

- expand and explain each statement in the level descriptions with specific criteria (similar to the guidance for Adult Literacy and Numeracy);

- include exemplar generic tasks with very specific markschemes to illustrate achievement at a level in relation to individual tasks and in different subject contexts;
- show exemplar responses with commentaries to aid internal standardisation.

Requests within CCEA for additional trialling were turned down. However, during this time close links were maintained with the Literacy Strategy Group and the Numeracy Steering Group, seeking their feedback on numerous occasions.

Development work at this stage was carried out by CCEA C&A staff, Key Stage 1 and 2 moderators, Key Stage 3 IT moderators, the Principal Moderators for GCSE English and Mathematics and the former officer in charge of Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 Mathematics.

Stage 5

August 2006 – July 2009

With the Education (NI) Order 2006 it became clear that the Levels of Progression would once more become a statutory tool for assessment.

Detailed mapping exercises were carried out with regard to:

- Functional Skills standards for English, Mathematics and ICT (to ensure continuity with Key Stage 4 and beyond, and consistency with the National Qualifications Framework)
- Essential Skills standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
- Revised Northern Ireland curriculum – minimum content for Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy (to ensure that the assessment criteria matched the requirements of the curriculum)

The levels were also mapped and compared to the following:

- Current Level Descriptions for English, Mathematics and IT (Key Stages 1, 2 and 3) (for continuity of standards and familiarity in the system)
- Revised Lines of Development for Mathematics and Numeracy
- Alta Mathematics criteria
- English National Curriculum levels for English, Mathematics and ICT (for comparative purposes)
- NI Numeracy Strategy Lines of Progression for Key Stage 3
- GCSE criteria for English and Mathematics

In addition, a number of assessment tasks were developed for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT, for both Primary and Key Stage 3.

In 2006-7 the Key Stage 3 Regional Pilot schools received assessment training in planning and coordinating assessment, as well as on the levels and tasks.

In early 2007 a consultation and feasibility study was carried out with a number of primary and Key Stage 3 teachers. In January, a total of 11 primary and post-primary teachers provided written reports, reviewing the Levels of Progression for Communication, Using Maths and Using

ICT. In March to May, around 60 Year 4 and Year 7 teachers gave feedback on the levels and tasks, and tried out some of the tasks with their pupils. Similarly, around 35 Key Stage 3 teachers from a range of subject backgrounds were consulted on the proposed approaches to assessment. Each stage of the consultation involved a formal evaluation process. Materials and findings from these were shared with the Literacy and Numeracy Steering Groups.

From January 2008 on, work was initiated on the additional guidance identified in Stage 4, i.e. detailed support for the Levels of Progression, additional tasks for Primary and the gathering of pupil responses to provide exemplification. This was carried out having sought the advice of cross-phase working groups of teachers (January to March 2008), including those from an Irish Medium context. Further refinements were made to the Levels of Progression in response to feedback from teachers in these working groups.

In March 2008, amendments were made to the Communication levels 1-3 in response to suggestions from ELB Foundation Stage Literacy officers.

Additionally, from January to May 2008, a group of 30 Primary teachers trialled the assessment process for Communication and Using Maths, and an evaluation report was produced. The KS3 pilot schools participated in an 'agreeing standards' event.

A number of mapping exercises were carried out to ascertain the relationship between the criteria for levels of attainment for English and Mathematics and the levels of progression for Communication and Using Mathematics. Evidence from these mapping exercises (presented to DE in October 2008) indicated that there was a general consistency in the difficulty of individual criteria and in the breadth of criteria at a level. However, it was emphasised that certain factors were likely to impact on outcomes when making holistic judgements about the level achieved by a pupil. These included the competence-based, 'pupils can' nature of the LoPs, the emphasis on pupils being able to use and apply their skills and the potentially cross-curricular nature of the evidence.

In February – March 2009, the DE consultation on the Reporting Regulations was used as an opportunity to consult on the draft Levels of Progression which were developed by CCEA to reflect the revised curriculum and which set out the standards that pupils will be expected to achieve in Communication (literacy), Using Mathematics (numeracy) and Using ICT.

CCEA reviewed the Levels of Progression in light of feedback received through the DE consultation. This included contacting the Literacy Strategy Group Chair, the Numeracy Steering Group and the ETI ICT Panel to inform them of progress to date. As a result, CCEA officers worked with designated Literacy, Numeracy and ICT CASS officers to review the content of the levels of progression in detail and to ensure that the levels were consistent with the revised NI Curriculum, with literacy and numeracy approaches in schools and that they were pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty.

A further range of comparability studies was carried out at Primary and Post-Primary between March and June 2009. In the Primary study, portfolios from 61 schools (containing approximately 1,400 samples of work), which had been submitted for moderation as part of the ongoing CCEA operational moderation process, were used to complete a comparability study which compared the current levels of attainment with the draft levels of progression. At Key

Stage 3, the study used evidence from 25 schools (involving approximately 2,700 pupils) to compare pupils' performance, as measured using the teacher assessed current levels of attainment in English and Mathematics, with teacher assessments made using the draft levels of progression for Communication and Using Mathematics. An additional comparison was made with both teacher assessed outcomes and level outcomes from the externally set and marked end of Key Stage 3 English and Mathematics tests. Supplementary evidence was also provided by 'double marking' a small sample of Key Stage 3 work for Using Mathematics and Communication which had been provided by schools to exemplify pupil performance in relation to the draft Levels of Progression.

The results of the comparability studies showed that, while there was a strong correlation between the two sets of standards, the levels of progression were more demanding. It was therefore likely that the percentage of pupils attaining each level would drop slightly when the system migrated from one set of standards to the other. Some minor amendments were made to the levels based on observations arising from the comparability studies.

In its subsequent advice of July 2009, CCEA proposed that the levels of progression be used as the statutory measure for assessing the cross-curricular skills of Communication and Using Mathematics within the revised NI Curriculum.

In 2010 some final amendments were made to ensure consistency, clarity of demand and terminology within levels, across levels and across the three sets of Levels of Progression (Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT).

Development of the Irish Medium (Communication) Levels of Progression

At the Irish Medium Advisory Group (IMAG meeting) of October 2007, where priorities for the year ahead were identified, the group were advised that: 'A group will begin work on the Lines of Progression for Irish based on the current curriculum document for IM schools, the English Lines of Progression and previous documentation on level attainments and performance indicators.'

Work began on the Irish Medium Levels of Progression in November 2007. The following were initially involved in the working group:

- CCEA staff;
- experienced practising teachers representing all Key Stages (Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 3);
- IM ELB adviser.

The working group was given a translation of the English Levels of Progression and carte blanche to:

- reject entirely the English Levels;
- write the Irish Levels from scratch;
- adapt and customise the English Levels making whatever changes that they thought were essential.

The IM Levels were not just a translation but a customisation of the English Levels to make them appropriate for the IM sector. The significant changes centred around how a child could show understanding of the language and emphasis was placed on body language as an indicator of understanding. It was also felt that as a pupil's vocabulary was enriched and increased that it was important to demonstrate the ability of pupils to manage translation from one language to another. This was particularly emphasised at levels 6 and 7 but it was understood that this process of moving from one language to another is there from pre-level one. It was intended that a trial of the Levels would be undertaken and this was proposed but was not feasible at this time.

In January 2008 cross-phase groups were established for both Communication and Using Mathematics, with the specific remit to advise on supporting guidance. These groups included IM representation.

In 2008 a working group comprised of teachers from Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 2 was set up to develop Communication tasks and as part of their brief they were asked to look closely at the Levels of Progression to ensure that they were fit for purpose; no changes of any significance were suggested. As changes were made to the English Levels of Progression the IM version was amended to take account of these changes.

In 2009 CCEA was asked to design an online training course on the Levels of Progression; this also included an Irish-medium aspect to the work. As part of the work connected to the online course, a review was undertaken by the CCEA IM Officers of the Communication Levels of Progression and some minor changes were made.

In January 2010 schools were approached to provide teachers who would take part in exemplification work on the Levels of Progression for Communication. As part of this work teachers were asked to look closely at the statements and suggest any changes that they felt might be appropriate. In the follow up meetings in March, no significant proposals were forthcoming from the teachers present who represented teachers from Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 2. However, it was felt that more acknowledgement of the process of learning and the bilingual/translanguaging aspect could be identified. (No specific suggestions were forthcoming from the group about how to do this).

At the request of DE the Levels were looked at again by CCEA staff on 8 & 9 March 2010 and minor adjustments were made to, among other things, more fully take account of the Tusincint/Understanding element.

On 25 March 2010, in response to a request from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, DE asked CCEA to undertake one final piece of work that would provide the Department with further assurance around the robustness and appropriateness of the Levels of Progression for Communication through Irish, with a particular focus on primary and, within primary, on Key Stage 1.

On 15 April CCEA conducted a consultation meeting, as requested in the DE letter of 25 March, with 14 representatives of key Irish Medium stakeholder groups. This meeting was chaired by CCEA and included Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; CASS advisory service; ETI; Former Fonaic na Gaeilge Officer; 3 IME Principals; 7 teacher practitioners; and 4 CCEA staff (facilitating).

People Involved

The following were involved at various stages in writing the Levels of Progression:

- Initially, working groups of CCEA staff, practising teachers and ELB advisers

Thereafter...

- experienced CCEA officers within curriculum and assessment development (i.e. officers previous/current responsibilities for key stage assessment)
- CCEA Key Stage 1 and 2 moderators for English and Mathematics
- Key Stages 2 and 3 IT moderators and revisers
- Examinations APO for English/Principal Moderator for GCSE English Talking and Listening
- Principal Moderator, GCSE Mathematics/ ELQ Maths for Life
- Chief Examiner and Chief Coursework Moderator for Moving Image Arts
- teachers of Key Stage 3 mathematics
- the respective Creative Learning Centres (Nerve Centre, Studio On, Amma Centre)
- Professor Carol McGuinness, QUB

The following were informed/consulted at different stages in the development of the Levels of Progression, and contributed to refining and clarifying criteria, progression and presentation:

- Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 teachers involved in the trials and feasibility studies for Levels of Progression, Pupil Profile and Accreditation
- Key Stage 3 pilot schools
- Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 teachers involved in working groups for the additional guidance
- Literacy Strategy Group
- Numeracy Steering Group
- ELB advisers for Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and Foundation Stage
- Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 Implementation Groups
- CCEA examination officers for English, Mathematics and ICT
- CCEA Chief Marker and Assistant Chief Markers for Key Stage 3 English
- ETI
- IM representatives: Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, ELB CASS, ETI, Fonaic na Gaeilge, principals, teachers

Documentation

The following documents were referenced during the process (for consistency of terminology and standards)

- Current Level Descriptions for English, Mathematics and IT (Key Stages 1, 2 and 3)
- Revised Curriculum for Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy at Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1, 2 and 3
- Revised Lines of Development for Mathematics and Numeracy
- NI Numeracy Strategy Lines of Progression (Key Stage 3)
- Functional Skills standards for English, Mathematics and ICT

- Essential Skills standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
- GCSE criteria for English and Mathematics
- Alta mathematics criteria
- English National Curriculum levels for English, Mathematics and ICT
- First Steps Literacy documentation