To Education Committee

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From Director of Education

Subject: Higher Still Programme – Update on Implementation in North Lanarkshire

Purpose and Content

To update members of the education committee on progress with the implementation of the Higher Still reform in North Lanarkshire schools and on priorities for continuing development of the programme.

Recommendations

The education committee is asked:

(i) To note and approve the contents of this report.

Members wishing further information should contact
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Higher Still Programme – Update on Implementation in North Lanarkshire

Report by Director

1. Introduction

1.1 In January 1998 the Director of Education presented to the education committee the education department’s implementation plan for the Higher Still reform of the upper secondary school curriculum.

1.2 Significant progress has been made in the authority’s schools in taking forward key elements of the Higher Still programme. Schools are to be commended for the commitment, time and energy with which they have addressed implementation, given the complexity of the reform and difficulties linked to the central administration of the programme.

1.3 A review of the authority’s initial implementation plan has been carried out and a report prepared which provides information on:

(i) progress to date
(ii) continuing issues and concerns
(iii) priorities for the next stage of implementation

This document is attached as an appendix to this report.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The education committee is asked:

(i) to note and approve the contents of the report.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. In Phase 1 of its implementation plan North Lanarkshire Council reaffirmed its endorsement of the rationale and broad thrust of the Higher Still programme as outlined in *Higher Still: Opportunity for All* (SOEID, 1994). The plan laid out the department’s commitment to secure the fullest advantages of Higher Still for all its young people by providing courses and qualifications to meet the needs of all students, developing curriculum structures to assure continuity, coherence, flexibility and progression, the encouragement of higher and broader achievement by all students and the promotion and development in young people of core skills to the highest level of which they are capable.

1.2. The main aim of the authority has always been to ensure an approach to the senior school curriculum in North Lanarkshire schools which is:

- inclusive – in that it provides for the needs of all students in the S5/6 cohort
- coherent – in that there should be a clear relationship between the components of a student’s curriculum
- consistent – in that the curriculum is seen to be based upon common principles and guidelines
- effective – in that it is based upon methodologies and approaches which allow course objectives to be met for students
- localised – in that it has regard for the circumstances and needs of individual establishments
- in partnership – recognising that the widest range of options is likely to be available to students across the authority where there is a genuine willingness to pool and share curricular experience and curriculum opportunities.

1.3. The fact that responsibility for the implementation of Higher Still resides with individual establishments has been well-established. The expectation that headteachers would ensure that the aims of the programme would be fulfilled and that a comprehensive and inclusive S5/6 curriculum would be developed with a full and appropriate range of courses and units provided for all students in their schools has been adopted. Schools have undertaken their duty to determine their implementation priorities in the context of school development planning and within the broad strategic and support framework established by the authority. They have selected units and courses at particular levels which best meet the needs of students for progression, taking account of schools’ current provision, staffing and resources and the requirements of phasing.

1.4. The authority has continued to carry out its role to provide strategic direction for North Lanarkshire schools, ensuring that there is a clear sense of purpose, that the co-ordination of support addresses agreed school needs and that resources are deployed in the most effective and economic manner.
2. ACTION TO DATE

2.1 Education Department

The authority adopted as its main priority the need to support individual establishments through ensuring access to expertise and quality staff development which:

- helps to develop the confidence and competence of teachers in delivering the new or revised Courses
- supports the ability of senior management to address the management agenda represented by curriculum planning, group awards, core skills and assessment
- enables guidance staff to cater effectively for the guidance needs of senior pupils

In addition, the authority has made a significant commitment to the exploration of appropriate curriculum guidelines for 16+, of a framework for local area curriculum planning and of effective local partnership working involving schools, further education colleges and the careers service.

2.2 Higher Still Strategy Group

The Higher Still Strategy Group which was established in January 1997 to advise the Director of Education on the implementation of the programme has met regularly to frame advice on strategy implications, to oversee and monitor the planned programme of staff development materials, to carry out appropriate research activity, to liaise with any area planning structures set up by HSDU or SCCC and to liaise with HSDU regarding possible development materials.

Four working sub-groups – on Implementation, Guidance, Communications, Information and Communication Technology – have prepared briefings for the Strategy Group on specific aspects of the programme as well as initiating developments to facilitate implementation.

2.3 Liaison with the Higher Still Development Unit

Effective liaison with HSDU has helped to ensure that the authority remains fully briefed on developments at national level and that local implementation plans have shown coherence and consistency with national planning efforts. Officer participation in regular HSDU/LEA directorate seminars, regular meetings with the HSDU field officer for the area, and the participation of the HSDU field officer in the work of the department’s steering group have enabled a smooth two-way flow of information to mutual benefit. Similarly the continued involvement in the national programme of implementation studies of Brannock High School has provided a source of very valuable information which has had a direct benefit on discussions involving schools across the authority. Additionally, North Lanarkshire staff have been actively involved in other development activities, including participation in short-life working groups considering specific aspects identified by the Higher Still Strategy Group. The Council’s support for the principle of voluntary staff participation in the development programme allowed a number of authority staff to be released to participate by serving on specialist groups, acting as development officers in subject areas or as national trainers. This principle has been adhered to throughout the
intervening time, and has been useful in maintaining links between the authority's plans and those of the national programme.

2.4 Staff Development

- The authority has taken seriously its responsibility to make adequate and appropriate staff development provision for all of its teaching staff.

- The authority has supported fully the national programme of staff development seminars for subject leaders, guidance staff and senior managers both in the period leading up to implementation and subsequently.

- Higher Still issues have continued to be standing items at business meetings of subject leaders, guidance staff and senior managers and all editions of the authority's in-service catalogue since 1996-97 have shown a major focus on Higher Still issues across the curriculum.

- In January 1998 the authority provided each subject department with a copy of its Departmental Planning for Implementation: A short programme for subject departments. This provided all departments with a flexible resource to use in their planning towards implementation.

- The authority has committed its advisory staff to be available to support schools and area groupings of schools on in-service closure days. In-service closure programmes have included

  - a day for all subject teachers in secondary schools focusing on documentation, arrangements, assessment and IT (May 1998)

  - the provision for all secondary schools of a guidance audit tool (November 1998)

  - a supplementary programme of targeted support to enable all guidance staff to feel confident about their various roles in Higher Still (February 1999)

  - and subject specialist focused inputs in 'problem' areas (e.g. English, Art and Design, Computing, Modern Languages other than French) (February and May 2000).

In addition, Quality Development Service staff have responded to a variety of local needs and have delivered staff development support across a range of topics.

- Both subject and guidance panels have been convened by secondary advisers to provide a forum for the discussion of areas of concern and to allow the exchange of views and materials. This activity has been complementary to the Higher Still agenda of the normal business meetings.

- Care has been taken to ensure that the needs of staff in SEN establishments are fully addressed in the implementation programme and that the special recognised knowledge and expertise of SEN staff contribute to the provision of advice and appropriate materials at Access level.
Since August 1998 the authority has been committed to a programme of in-house support for all guidance staff in all establishments to allow them to gain first hand hands-on experience of the updated versions of the guidance databases PlanIT and Progress. The authority ensured that the training programme included the involvement of a variety of other staff (e.g. librarians) who often have a significant role to play in support of the guidance programme. Phase 2 of this programme will run in Autumn 2000.

The need to ensure that staff involved in support for learning would have a broad and confident familiarity with the provisions of the Higher Still Programme was emphasised and extensive provision was included as part of the QDS catalogue of staff development. The requirement that they should be presented with opportunities for staff development in PAT and on in-service days to familiarise themselves with the requirements of Higher Still, and to develop skills in relation to the development of information and study skills programmes was underlined.

Since March 1998, regular meetings have been organised by the authority’s lead-officer and have involved Higher Still Co-ordinators from all establishments. These provide a forum for information-giving as well as information-gathering, discussion of issues and consultation on plans as they are likely to impact on implementation in schools.

The authority maintains a comprehensive database of staff development activities provided by North Lanarkshire QDS and HSDU. This allows the authority and its schools to form a clear picture of the pattern of staff development across North Lanarkshire.

2.5 Implementation Studies and Specialist Support

In 1996 the authority commissioned an examination of existing timetable, curriculum and guidance structures. Follow up seminars to disseminate, share, discuss and reflect on the findings of the in-school studies were held in February and September/October 1997.

In between these events follow-up visits to schools were made on request to discuss specific aspects of implementation as it might affect individual schools. In addition, the report of the implementation study carried out in Brannock High School contained many useful insights into a range of curricular, guidance and management issues and was subsequently issued to all establishments.

When, in session 1998-99, schools began to plan the curricular structures which would be in place for August 1999, the authority ran a series of twilight seminars for senior managers to enable discussion, planning and analysis of possible structures. This was followed up by one half-day consultancy visit per school.

2.6 College Liaison

In terms of the authority’s commitment to partnership, the associated colleges within North Lanarkshire have endorsed the authority’s priorities for implementation and anticipate the establishment of a framework for local area curriculum planning and collaborative working at all levels. Following an initial liaison meeting in March 1997 with further education college management and Higher Still Co-ordinators, a representative of the colleges’ group
was co-opted on to the Strategy Group. Regular meetings take place with representatives of all three North Lanarkshire colleges of Further Education to develop opportunities for school-college collaboration in line with national strategies. In addition a representative of each college attends meetings with school Higher Still Co-ordinators to support and implement collaborative initiatives.

2.7 The resource implications of the development programme have been kept under constant review. The authority reacted swiftly with fully resourced support to needs identified by schools and practitioners within schools and was able to channel support in certain key areas of need ahead of the national programme of material production. Further, North Lanarkshire has played a leading role in the setting up of an inter-authority collaborative mechanism to allow all participating authorities to share, at minimum cost, all classroom materials produced to support Higher Still studies across the full range of subjects at all levels. To date this successful initiative has involved 31 authorities.

2.8 In line with the authority’s commitment to work in partnership with parents and the community, opportunity to consult on the implications of the Higher Still programme was provided within and through existing consultative structures such as school boards and the Parents Consultative Committee. In addition, the authority hosted (in November and December 1998) three open area meetings for parents and other interested groups to explain and discuss Higher Still. This involved representatives of HSDU, the Careers Service and the authority. Use was made of the information and publicity materials generated by the central Higher Still Development Programme at these and other parents’ consultation evenings which were offered by individual establishments.

2.9 Schools

The recommendation that senior management teams should be fully involved from an early stage in all aspects of a school’s implementation strategy, particularly through their links with subject departments, has been reflected in school practice. All headteachers appointed a member of their senior management team to be the school’s Higher Still Co-ordinator to fulfil the role as the school’s link with the Quality Development Service and HSDU. The co-ordinators have operated in the key role of liaising with subject departments and staff and have provided regular updates within the school to senior management, to Principal Teacher meetings, and to staff meetings. In many schools groups of other staff members convened for the purpose have assisted the co-ordinator in the process of implementing and monitoring Higher Still developments within the school. This aspect was left to the discretion of individual schools to operate as they saw appropriate within the school’s own development plan.

2.10 Staff Development

Understandably, schools have chosen to devote a significant proportion of available curriculum and staff development time since 1997-98 to aspects of Higher Still. In addition to addressing the needs of subject staff, clear priority has been given to the importance of allocating time to meet the needs of senior management, guidance and support for learning staff and non-teaching staff (e.g. librarians). Despite the major demand on both time and resources, senior management teams continued to give appropriate attention to other developments, notably 5-14. Since the introduction of the Excellence Fund programme, a significant proportion of funding has been delegated directly to schools to support their implementation plans spanning 1999-2002.
2.11 Communication

Schools ensured that, at an appropriate time in the implementation period, parents, students and other relevant members of the school community were made aware of the distinctive nature of the Higher Still programme and its implications for students. All schools ran Higher Still-specific parents’ evenings involving relevant inputs and question & answer sessions.

2.12 For most schools, the development priority up to the end of session 1998-99 was to ensure the safe passage of the new Higher level courses wherever possible. North Lanarkshire schools made a significant commitment to implementation at the earliest viable opportunity, and not simply at Higher level, as the following figures show:

(i) **Higher**
The overall figure for replacement of existing Higher Grade courses by Higher courses in session 1999/2000 was 83% (national figure = 81%).

(ii) **Intermediate 2**
The average number of departments per school offering courses or units at Intermediate 2 was 11.7 (national figure = 10.1).

(iii) **Intermediate 1**
The average number of departments per school offering courses or units at Intermediate 1 was 4.4. (national figure 3.3).

(iv) **Access**
The total number of schools departments offering units at Access Level was 5 (only 6 authorities nationally recorded a higher figure).

2.13 The planning for the implementation of Advanced Higher courses began to feature as a priority for the authority in session 1999-2000. The provision of Advanced Higher courses is a vital aspect of the Higher Still curricular framework. The recognition of the new post-higher award by tertiary institutions is seen as a most welcome development and schools are expected to ensure that opportunities will continue to be made available to extend those S6 pupils who are capable of achievement beyond the level of Higher. A survey of schools curricular intentions for session 2000-2001 has indicated that all schools anticipate being involved in the delivery of Advanced Higher in some way, with as many as 17 subjects identified across the authority.

2.14 Guidance

The need to provide up to date and relevant information for students with regards to career and educational progression routes beyond S5/6 is recognised as central to the Higher Still programme. Schools and the authority have maintained regular links with careers service staff with a view to assessing and responding to the changes required in the level and range of careers service expertise required. School Guidance coordinators in consultation within the senior management and Guidance teams have been giving consideration to ways in which the Guidance entitlement can be delivered to all students in S5 and S6. The authority is presently conducting a survey of the position at the end of one year of implementation and will be publishing a paper on this in December 2000.
2.15 Core Skills

With the publication of a range of documentation on Core Skills – the Core Skills manual, Managing Core Skills and the Core Skills Subject Guide supplement - significant strides were taken towards embedding core skills within Standard Grade courses wherever possible. In 1998 the authority commissioned additional implementation and analytical studies which were shared with schools in the form of staff development seminars. While schools will generally not make final decisions in this area until they have had the opportunities to reflect upon and evaluate all aspects of the published materials and studies, they have been active in auditing the core skills component in the S3 – S6 curriculum provision as it applies to the new framework. As collaborative approaches between schools and colleges develop, colleges anticipate that they may be able to offer support for the delivery of core skills in areas where there are identified gaps in provision.

2.16 Support for Learning

It was anticipated that Higher Still would have implications for Learning Support staff through the provision of curricular consultancy to subject staff to assist with the effective teaching of appropriately differentiated classes and for the support of students following Access Level courses. Schools have accepted the need as part of their implementation strategy to undertake to provide students working at Access level with appropriate progression routes and range of choice.

3. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND CONCERNS

3.1 Whilst much has now been clarified about many central features of the programme which were previously regarded as problematic, some issues remain to be addressed:

- Core Skills have been the subject of detailed discussion and consultation and schools have welcomed efforts to incorporate Core Skills by an embedding process, so as to minimise the need to provide additional dedicated units to deliver them. The liaison with colleges also supports this work. As the Core Skills profiles of pupils are identified the colleges are able to devise individual learning plans and thereby provide articulation between school and college courses within the national qualifications framework.

- Scottish Group Awards continue to raise timetabling and curriculum structure issues. The process of consultation has been a long and complex one and schools are actively considering the extent of their likely provision of group awards in 2001-2002 and beyond. The relationship with colleges and the consideration of the development of complementary curricula between schools and colleges are seen as possible avenues towards offering pupils the opportunity to achieve a range of units, courses and Scottish Group Awards. Such a partnership approach may have potential to address some of the timetabling and curriculum structure issues which impact upon the delivery of Scottish Group Awards.

- The willingness of tertiary establishments to recognise the value of the Advanced Higher award in addition to the established position of Higher in terms of entry is
welcomed. Further detail as to how tertiary establishments will integrate Advanced Higher awards within their admissions requirements is awaited.

3.2 The absence of over-arching guidance on assessment had raised fears and concerns at an earlier point, concerning the assessment driven nature of units and courses, the compatibility of internal and external assessment, the cumulative nature of the demands of internal assessment on staff and pupils, the management of the unprecedented volume of assessment data, the assessment implications of group awards, record keeping and security, resit opportunities and time limits for the completion of assessments necessary to gain awards.

Concerns over the volume of assessment involved in Higher Still provision were voiced throughout the development period. The publication of Managing Assessment (June 1998) and National Assessment Bank materials succeeded in clarifying some of these issues, although close monitoring in the first year of implementation both by schools and authority established that the true position was at odds with SQA’s predictions.

Very serious concerns have emerged about the disappointing performance of SQA in terms of data management relating to unit and course entries, and the serious workload problem which has ensued for senior managers.

In addition, certain aspects of internal assessment have emerged as problematic and onerous as a result of the experiences of schools in the first year of implementation. Among the concerns articulated by schools have been:

- the timing of internal assessments and the perception of an element of parental pressure to delay testing to ensure students have the optimum chance of success
- the volume of assessment, the prospect of assessment fatigue/overload for some pupils and the general impact on teaching and learning
- the demands of moderation
- the relationship between the standards expected in internal and external assessments

Representation has been made to the SQA on these and other matters and assurances sought that the SQA would address them and work to simplify, improve and refine a system which, notwithstanding the acknowledged difficulties of hardware and software, is seen to be complex, cumbersome and too demanding.

3.3 A short-life working group on assessment was set up with a brief to provide a practical support document to schools. This has been released to schools and is currently being revised and updated to take account of the issues raised in 3.3. above.

3.4 Second Examination Diet

The implications of the decision to introduce a second diet of examinations as an integral feature of the Higher Still assessment framework requires careful consideration. Schools have expressed a number of reservations about this decision, among them:

- the timing of any 2nd diet and its impact on classwork
- the impact of success in a 2nd diet on pupil motivation
- planning for pupil progression in the event of a successful examination outcome
- an increase in an already bureaucratic and onerous administrative demands
- the setting and marking demands on school staff
- the accommodation demands linked to a 2nd diet

The authority proposes to issue guidance to schools on the 2nd diet following consultation with headteachers and professional association.

3.5 In the light of the above, the decision of the Minister of Education to review the first year of the implementation of Higher Still and to publish his findings is welcome. The results of this review will require to be given due consideration when they are available.


4.1 Staff and Curriculum Development

The authority has sought to support schools in all aspects of staff and curriculum development necessary to ensure the effective delivery of Higher Still in North Lanarkshire schools. In addition to encouraging and supporting establishment participation in HSDU training programme, assistance has been provided through QDS, the Higher Still Strategy Group, regular meetings of Higher Still Co-ordinators, specialist support in curricular and timetabling matters and peer support and networking arrangements within and beyond North Lanarkshire. This commitment will continue to be one of the authority’s priorities.

4.2 Making proper provision for all of its teaching staff in terms of Higher Still has seen a systematic targeting of in-service closure days to allow maximum involvement of authority staff in relevant developmental activity. This has been planned to dovetail with the range of in-house programmes which schools themselves have offered. The commitment by the authority to support all staff in preparation for Higher Still will continue to be given high priority. Courses will be offered for staff at all levels and at all stages of readiness. Support for staff in departments in schools will continue and QDS staff will continue to respond positively to specific requests by individuals and departments. The major priorities for support and development will be Advanced Higher, Intermediate 1 & 2 and Access.

4.3 The policy of offering specific programmes of support on in-service closure days will continue. Such programmes have been offered on a half-day basis from May 1998 to May 2000 and it is planned to make support available in February 2001 and May 2001. They will be targeted at subject teachers in the authority and reflect the issues and concerns arising from implementation. A regular feature of these has been an adviser/national trainer-led programme for staff. It is planned to continue this approach, which has been well-received by staff.
4.4 **Core Skills**

An element of funding has been available to enable the authority to respond to requests from subject and guidance forums for staff development on particular curricular initiatives. Panels have been guided by statements provided by HSDU specifying support requirements of particular Higher Still courses and units. This support has been augmented to allow the commissioning of a range of specific needs-targeted writing tasks. The authority has committed funding for this until 2002 via the Higher Still strand of the Excellence Fund. Another important development area will be the provision of classroom support materials to address key topics and themes at Access 2 & 3.

4.5 As the Higher Still programme is phased in, schools will give increasing attention to the area of Core Skills and Group Awards. As these are clearly significant both for tertiary establishments and for employers, the authority will wish to ensure that all of its young people derive maximum available benefit. Further work will be commissioned in these areas for completion in June 2001.

4.6 **Curriculum Planning**

The decision was taking in 1999 to defer consultation on 16+ curriculum guidelines to allow consideration of the implications both of the revised SCCC guidelines on the secondary curriculum and of the ministerial statement concerning age and stage relaxation, and of the authority’s own extensive consultation on ‘The Curriculum of Secondary Schools’. It is the intention to proceed to consultation in session 2000-01 on guidance on the secondary curriculum for schools in North Lanarkshire. This guidance will make distinct reference to the 16+ curriculum and include reference to Local Area Curriculum Planning, initial proposals for which have been the subject for discussion at headteachers’ meetings in the previous 2 sessions.

4.7 The authority will seek to support schools in maximising pupil curricular opportunities in 3 ways:

- Guidance on area curricular planning arrangements will be included in the secondary curriculum guidelines to be issued during this term and area groups will be invited to submit their proposals for area curriculum planning in March 2001.

- The authority has undertaken a successful on-line learning project in Latin and has engaged with 2 separate consortia which are developing material for on-line learning with a Higher Still focus. The potential of this area will continue to be explored.

- In the context of the online learning community, the authority will provide a discussion forum and frequently-asked questions facility for Higher Still co-ordinators, guidance staff, subject specialists and other interest groups via the authority’s website for Higher Still. Implementation will be supported by appropriate staff development.

4.8 **ICT**

It is anticipated that all secondary schools will soon have in place a school network infrastructure with wide-area access to a North Lanarkshire education intranet and to the internet itself. The intranet will provide a communications environment which will allow the online dissemination of information and will support online communications among schools, the authority and other agencies. Overall, these will enhance communication of
Higher Still issues and developments. The authority aims to develop the intranet as the prime mode of dissemination of information relating to Higher Still matters. Specifically a Higher Still website and an online learning community focused on Higher Still staff development issues will underpin the authority's strategy and commitments related to Higher Still.

4.9 Assessment and Quality Assurance

Assessment and quality assurance issues will be given significant support. The management and delivery of assessment in schools continues to be a cause for concern for staff. The authority will ensure that all issues find support and will continue to commission relevant work to support schools and to reduce their burden wherever possible. A start will be made with the issue of the Steering Group's revised guidance on assessment in September 2000.

4.10 Guidance

The authority is committed to support all guidance staff and to provide regular updates and support packages when required. In 1999-2000, as in previous years, the authority committed to the provision of directly targeted training in the use of the databases to support pupil choice and planning in terms of progressive pathways within Higher Still and towards higher education, further education or the world of work. Training has been commissioned for Autumn 2000 in similar terms to that previously provided.

4.11 Personal and Social Education

Programmes of Personal and Social Education continue to develop as a highly significant aspect, not only of guidance provision per se, but also as a key factor in Higher Still itself. The authority will continue to focus on this dimension and will provide updates on this, including, where appropriate, advice to schools.

4.12 Second Diet

The authority will consult on the provision of a second diet of examinations, and will publish its advice and recommendations by December 2000.

4.13 Communications

The Higher Still newsletter has been successful in informing school staff and the education community of North Lanarkshire of progress in the planning and implementation of new provision. A website has now been set up and will incorporate this function. The website will continue to be developed and expanded and will be updated regularly, building up a reference and information resource for all users.