Context

I am a teacher of 35 years’ experience. I am currently Faculty Leader for Science at Largs Academy, North Ayrshire. The comments that follow are based on my own experience as a marker, as a class teacher and as a faculty leader.

CFE – Curricular structure and content

Change was needed especially in the science.

The speed of change and the manner has been unprecedented and poorly managed.

Structure

We are encouraged to think of a 3-18 journey for our learners and yet in Secondary schools we have then to divide artificially into a BGE and a Senior phase.

We did not know what the senior phase looked like until after the BGE experiences and outcomes were published. The whole journey should have been given at the one time so we could see how to scaffold the skills and content needed to make it a coherent process. Instead we amended our courses for BGE pupils and then had to amend again to fit with the senior Phase requirements.

BGE

The initial experiences and outcomes were so vague that people had spent hours producing work that then was rendered less that useful when they saw what they needed for a successful transition to the senior phase. Some subjects that are more skills based maybe find this less of a problem but the sciences are very much skills AND content driven and so we need to build a pyramid of knowledge for our pupils. We were then given Significant Aspects of Learning and so amended the courses accordingly. Now we have been asked to comment on Draft Experiences and Outcomes which will involve more change.

Marking time

Why on earth are we holding pupils back from work they could easily cope with in S2 and moving them to the most appropriate level for them – and if that is Level 5 so be it. Only recently have we been allowed to acknowledge level 5 in S3. In reality this comes down to ridiculous semantics. A broad general education should be challenging and have depth.
Why also can they not be credited with units at whatever age? I have classes of S3 pupils who could easily achieve Unit passes at N4 and N5. Why can’t they be awarded those then if they want to drop the subject they at least have recognition of the work they have done and the level they have achieved.

At network, when I have asked about what other schools’ S3 courses look like, the answer is that those who have adopted a true BGE S1-3 Science programme have found themselves either squeezed for time because the science in the curriculum has been reduced to accommodate other subjects and/or pupils are ‘marking time’.

Pupils are very good at knowing by the time they reach the middle of S2 what they want to study. They know if they hate science or love it. Lots of good careers work is done in schools by specialists and class teachers discussing with pupils what they can do in the future. Let them choose earlier. In my school we have held onto choice between S2 and S3 and this works.

Number of Subjects in S4

We go from a wide choice of subjects in S3 to only 6 in S4 – and yet the Scottish education System has always been praised for its breadth at higher levels. If they make the wrong choice in S4 it’s much harder to alter and get it right. It’s possible but it’s hard.

I am unsure that this is not a money saving exercise by Local Authorities and if so someone higher up needs to take control and tell them what they should be doing.

If East Ren are doing so well, albeit with very little social housing or pupils in SIMD levels below 10, why are we not following their lead!?

We are being forced into models that don’t fit our context. We have a high achieving school and are working well to close the gap but are being forced into models of curricular structure that don’t suit our pupil demographic.

Support

I have to praise the support that Ed Scot have provided to the Sciences. This has been a good resource.

M Telfer