PROMOTING CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION: IMPLEMENTING THE 5–14 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN SECONDARY SCHOOL MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS.

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SYNOPSIS

One of the main aims of the 5–14 Development Programme was to promote continuity and progression in the learning and experiences of pupils. The stages P7 to S2 were of particular concern. In this paper we consider three aspects of the implementation activities in both secondary mathematics and English language departments which have the potential to contribute to meeting this aim: primary–secondary liaison activities; primary school records; and developments in assessment in S1/S2. We conclude that while communication between the sectors has considerably improved, the messages are not always understood, trusted or acted on. Nevertheless, there is evidence that secondary staff are more alert than previously to the differences in the attainment of pupils on entry, and have been responsive in a number of ways. Key differences between the responses in the two subject areas with respect to the implementation, particularly within assessment, are noted.

INTRODUCTION

> We take it as axiomatic that a young person's experience of education should be coherent, continuous and progressive. (CCC, 1986:5)

The strategies for improving the transition arrangements between primary and secondary sectors suggested by the 10–14 Report were widely welcomed and, although its proposals were not formally adopted as national policy, within a few years many of the suggested strategies became commonplace in secondary schools: for example, the visits of primary pupils to secondary school classrooms to meet their future teachers; and the production of school brochures to inform parents, in non-technical language, of 'the circumstances and requirements of the secondary school'. However, progress towards the more important objectives set out in the Report—those of ensuring curricular continuity, and improving progression in the learning and development of individual pupils—was less in evidence. In the 1980s, there was no formal mechanism or generally accepted framework by means of which primary and secondary schools could come to agreements about key curricular components. In the absence of a nationally- or regionally-agreed common curricular structure and of effective mechanisms for cross-sector co-ordination, liaison activities were sporadic and many were of limited success.

One of the aims of the 5–14 Development Programme was to provide a focus for these unrealised objectives. It was the intention that the development should be seen as providing an enabling mechanism which would help teachers to address the problems which had already been identified within the system:

> The emphasis will be placed on assisting teachers with current problems rather than making unnecessary changes in the overall design of the curriculum or in individual subject areas. (SED, 1987:6)

Accordingly, the guidelines offer a facilitatory framework setting out the structures within which the curriculum content of subject areas should be organised, and set

out attainment targets at five levels (A–E) which indicate the expected progression in learning.

In many secondary schools, concern has been expressed for some time about problems associated with the organisation and delivery of the S1/S2 courses. For example, the SCCC S1/S2 Review Group, which conducted a series of brainstorming conferences with school staff, highlighted a variety of factors common in many schools which are inimical to the provision of continuity and progression in pupils' experiences and learning. These included: the practice of 'fresh start'; the slow or uneven pace of learning; the high degree of repetition; the narrow range of teaching methods in some subjects; and the lack of strategies to ensure progression (SCCC, 1993).

In this paper, we present data from an investigation in mathematics and English language departments into three aspects of the implementation of the 5–14 Programme which are central to the promotion of the continuity of pupils' learning across P7 to S2. These are: primary/secondary liaison activities; primary school records; and developments in assessment in S1/S2. We consider the ways in which these are being used by secondary school staff and the extent to which they improve the continuity of experiences offered to pupils across P7 and S1.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The study built on and extended data from the first phase of an evaluation programme which was undertaken between 1991 and 1995 (Simpson, Goulder and Tuson, 1995). The main aim of the final phase of the project, which ran from 1995 to 1997, was to monitor the extent of progress in the implementation of the 5–14 curriculum and assessment guidelines in secondary schools, and the resultant changes in classroom practices. Data were collected over three stages. In the autumn of 1995 visits were made to a set of five focus schools, three of which had been involved in the earlier phase of the study. Eighty–one interviews were conducted with a range of staff using a semi–structured interview schedule. In September 1996, detailed questionnaires were sent to key staff in a national sample of secondary schools (N=113). Responses were received from 93 schools. They were designed to address the main research questions, to investigate further some of the issues which had emerged from the interviews and to provide continuity of information on the implementation from the previous phase of the study. A final series of interviews in the focus schools, together with interviews of parents and pupils, was undertaken as a follow–up to the questionnaire at the end of 1996. A full account of the research questions, methods and findings can found in Simpson and Goulder (1997).

CROSS–SECTOR CONTACTS AND ACTIVITIES

The 10–14 Report had identified primary/secondary liaison as a vital component in the provision of continuity in pupils' experiences, but one which was complex and associated with many difficulties. Our data indicate that over the implementation period, the frequency of direct interaction between staff or pupils has increased only slightly. In our earliest data collected by questionnaire at the start of the implementation activities (1992), about 80 per cent of schools indicated that, prior to the implementation, visits of P7 pupils to the secondary school and visits to the primary school by learning support staff, had already been established. Around half of the principal teachers of mathematics and English indicated that they 'sometimes' visited primary schools; almost all the remainder indicated that this never, or rarely, occurred (Goulder, Simpson and Tuson, 1995).

Responses to the 1996 questionnaire indicate that at the stage when implementation is judged by school staff to be well underway, or almost complete, in over 80 per cent of mathematics and English language departments, these three activities are still the most frequently experienced forms of liaison. Over 80 per

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cent of the secondary principal teachers are involved in pupil visits to the secondary school and find them useful; the corresponding figure for useful staff visits to the primary school has increased only slightly to around 65 per cent. Around one third of staff remain uninvolved; but of those who do visit, almost all find the visits useful (Table 1).

Table 1: Primary/secondary liaison. The most successful/useful activities.

(Principal teachers of mathematics and English language 1994 and 1996 — per cent of questionnaire responses)				
	PT Mathematics		PT English	
	1994	1996	1994	1996
	very useful/ some use (not involved)	very/mostly successful (not involved)	very/mostly successful (not involved)	very useful/ some use (not involved)
primary pupils visiting secondary schools	79 (10)	85 (9)	86 (9)	96 (4)
discussion with primary teachers when visiting primary schools	61 (31)	64 (29)	66 (22)	66 (32)
discussion with learning support/ guidance teachers who have visited primary schools	47 (39)	83 (14)	58 (29)	80 (16)

The liaison link which shows the most significant change is the interaction between subject teachers and learning support staff. Frequency of engagement in, and satisfaction with, other types of liaison activities was reported at rather lower levels by both classroom teachers and principal teachers (Table 2), and there were interesting differences between the two subject areas. For example, the perception that link work is useful was indicated by rather more English than mathematics staff, and a considerably higher proportion of English staff than mathematics staff found that pupils' bringing examples of their work to the secondary school was a useful activity. Fifty per cent of the English principal teachers were involved in discussions on common marking criteria and almost all (48 per cent) found it useful; 73 per cent of mathematics principal teachers had not engaged in this activity and only seven per cent indicated that they had been involved and had found it useful. The proportions and the patterns were similar for classroom teachers.

The formal, planned, curriculum–focused liaison activities such as joint in–service events were more difficult to organise than informal cross–sector conversations, and subject–focused collaborative work did not always go as smoothly as the secondary staff had hoped. Some teachers believed the primary teachers' perception of them as subject specialists was a barrier to their working successfully together. In many of the secondaries, there was little co-ordinated planning of the liaison, which frequently stood or fell on the basis of the presence or commitment of an individual:

We started off with great energy and commitment. Since Mr X left we have stopped all meetings... there are no plans to rejuvenate it in any way – we haven't had contact for a year now... it depends on priorities... with Higher Still coming through, liaison may not be seen as a priority. (English Teacher)

Table 2: Primary/secondary liaison activities in 1996.

(Principal teachers (PT) and teachers (T) of mathematics and English language 1996 — per cent of questionnaire responses)				
	Mathematics PT (T)		English PT(T)	
	Not involved	Very useful/ of some use	Not involved	Very useful/ of some use
link work which pupils begin in primary school and finish in secondary school	61 (54)	26 (27)	50 (48)	44 (39)
pupils bringing examples of primary school work into secondary school	58 (55)	24 (22)	0 (27)	80 (59)
discussion about the curriculum at 5–14 cluster or area group meetings	58 (60)	29 (20)	46 (61)	46 (24)
discussion with primary colleagues about common marking criteria for 5–14 levels	73 (70)	7 (16)	50 (55)	48 (32)
joint in–service sessions with primary school(s)	63 (55)	24 (27)	58 (52)	38 (36)
use of secondary school material in primary schools	51 (52)	41 (29)	62 (55)	30 (29)
primary staff adopting common assessment and recording systems	41 (38)	44 (50)	48 (46)	46 (43)

Although 80 per cent of our sample of headteachers/co-ordinators indicated that, in their view, improved relationships with primary schools, prompted by the implementation of the Programme, had significantly contributed to improvements in the continuity and progression experienced by individual pupils, around 30 per cent indicated that problems associated with the relationship were an impediment to progress. Having a large number of associated primaries was cited as a source of difficulty by some staff, but it was not inevitable that large numbers created

difficulties and that small numbers were conducive to harmony. For example, we were asked to undertake an evaluation of a liaison project initiated by secondary staff involving fifteen associated primaries (Simpson, 1997a). Their activities were being undertaken in a context of co-operation, harmony and productive professional relationships. Clearly, variables other than numbers were also at work in those cases in which there were breakdowns or severe difficulties. In one of our five focus schools school groups, for example, autonomy of decision-taking appeared to be a higher priority with the primary headteachers than securing co-operation with their secondary colleagues over professional matters.

> Liaison is a difficulty. It's interesting, because we were at an in-service for 5–14 and it seemed to me that where you get a large number of primaries and a secondary and they work in a cluster, the small schools work very, very well together. And I think the difficulty we have is that we have only three, and they're all reasonable sizes and they almost want to be themselves and not necessarily 'the associate primary school group to the Academy'. They seem to hold the view that 'because I'm the headteacher of a school, I will be the head.' And they all have their own agenda. Trying to have a common development plan was actually quite problematic at times because the priorities were seen in different schools to be different things. And I shouldn't say this, but I will. It's almost as if there's competition between the three of them. The idea of wanting to share has kind of gone by the board. I would have to say really, over the period of 5–14, liaison has actually diminished rather than increased. (Headteacher)

In interviews, many teachers indicated that there were not enough additional resources to allow as great an increase in interaction with primary colleagues as they thought desirable. Discussions with the primary teachers who accompanied their pupils on their visits were the most securely established and most favoured vehicle for gaining useful information on individual pupils and their potential needs. However, some reported that their primary colleagues were increasingly using the opportunity afforded by their pupils visiting the secondary school to stay in their classrooms and get on with their own development work. Nevertheless, it could be argued that while such liaison activities are highly desirable, they are not absolutely necessary, provided the key information relevant to promoting progression in the achievements and development of the pupils is carried in the primary school records. To what extent are these records fulfilling this role?

PRIMARY SCHOOL RECORDS AND THEIR USE

A strong thread in the fabric of continuity should be provided by the individual's record of attainments passed from the primary to the secondary school. By the end of 1996, 50 per cent of mathematics and English language teachers were indicating that they now had the primary school records of their S1 pupils provided directly to them, a significant increase since our survey of 1994, and most of the respondents indicated that the information which they receive is 'about right' in its content and level of detail. Nevertheless, a high level of concern was expressed with respect to three aspects of the records: the consistency between records from different schools; their reliability as descriptors of what children knew and could do; and their usefulness to the planning of the secondary teacher.

The majority of interviewees commented unfavourably on the diverse nature of the records which they received and with which they were consequently faced when starting their new S1 classes:

> The information is very mixed depending on the primary. Some have National

Test results, C, D etc. whereas others are using a scale L, M, U; lower middle and upper. (Mathematics teacher)

Understandably, many liaison activities with respect to reporting were initiated by the secondary staff who are the recipients and users of the information about the pupils. Accordingly, they made efforts to encourage, and to persuade; and, when all else failed, to seek the Authorities' intervention to compel their primary colleagues to co-ordinate their reporting procedures. Frustration was expressed at the lack of co-operation from some primary schools and the apparent powerlessness of the Authority to ensure the co-ordination of activities or systems, even by democratic processes within the cluster:

I've spoken to my adviser about it, and headteachers of primary schools seem to have quite a bit of autonomy. Even the adviser said, 'You know, if they said they are not going to do it, there's nothing I can do.' I mean, with 5–14, I would have felt that the Region could say, not just for this Region, not just for this area, but for all groups, that when the pupils leave primary they should be passing on this information, and put out a document. Our document was based on a simplified version of what the Region actually recommended for a transfer document. And so I can't see why the Region can't say 'Alright. You agree on your documents, and then all of you must do it'. And, of course, when it's patchy, it's worse than useless. (Principal teacher, English)

If the reliability of the records and agreement on the use descriptors was to be established, it was clear that the kind of moderation procedures with which the secondary teachers are already familiar within the context of certification had to be applied across the sectors. One interviewee described how some of their difficulties had eventually been resolved through primary and secondary staff developing agreed statements to describe what different levels mean:

It's the agreed statement beside the letter that has been so important. We found that a year ago we were getting a lot of teachers saying. 'Oh, E/E+, definitely up at the top and working beyond'. Now that we've tied down what we really have agreed, and mean by that, the grades came down. We had very, very few that mentioned E+ at all. Two pupils compared to a hundred and forty. Because we were saying, 'Hang on. Do you really know what you mean? Completely confident with E, coping totally and now beyond it?' And primary teachers said, 'Oh, right. No. Not to that extent.' This year, the pattern of gradings which came in were significantly different to last year. Now that we have got these agreed criteria, people are saying 'OK. If that's what it means, then I'm prepared to say this about a pupil or that about a pupil.' (APT, mathematics)

However, for the primary teachers to choose to expend precious time and effort on compiling, improving and refining the accuracy of the records, there needs to be confidence that these are actually going to be used in the secondary schools to enhance progression in the learning experiences offered to the pupils, and it appears that reassurance of this is not offered by many secondary schools – 'We feel we are working hard at implementing this scheme, but what we pass on to the secondary school is either not understood or not used properly' commented one headteacher (quoted in Malcolm and Schlapp, 1997:84). The data in Table 3 should bring some reassurance. It indicates that there has been a significant increase in the use of primary records for a variety of purposes in the secondary departments; for example, for building on the levels achieved in the primary school. However, again there are interesting differences between the two subject areas, no doubt reflecting the different nature of these subjects and the reliance put on planned schemes of work

within mathematics. Thus, the records allow the mathematics staff to plan by selecting the materials covering the content which it is considered appropriate for the pupil to cover next; for English teachers, having the attainments of the pupils to hand is useful for building on the level of skills previously achieved, regardless of the content material which is used as a vehicle.

Table 3: Uses of primary records during S1

(Teachers of mathematics and English language 1994 and 1996 — per cent of questionnaire responses)				
	Teachers Mathematics		Teachers English language	
	1994	1996	1994	1996
planning appropriate work for pupils	53	81	28	46
grouping pupils by ability within a class	23	54	7	31
building on the level achieved in the primary school	57	76	27	77
building on the content covered in the primary school	33	44	12	20
checking your own assessment of pupils	48	69	35	79
broad banding or setting of pupils		19		8

The main users of the individual records were learning support staff, the majority (63 per cent) indicating that they referred to primary records for all pupils, not merely those with identified difficulties. Our data also indicated that there has been an expansion in the previously well–established role of learning support staff as bearers, collators and interpreters of useful and relevant information, which increasingly has 5–14 attainment descriptors as its focus (see Table 1). In the case of many subject teachers, this is their only link with the primary schools:

> The Learning Support staff pass on 'simplified' information about all S1 pupils to all subject departments, help maths and English compile lists of all attainment outcomes for all pupils and keep a list of all attainment outcomes (English and Maths) for our records. (Learning support staff)

While using records more frequently to plan work for the class, teachers are still reluctant to use it 'to judge the child'. The proportion of English (63 per cent) and mathematics (41 per cent) teachers who 'preferred to use their own judgements'

rather than rely on the primary records when initially planning S1 work for individual pupils shows only a slight decrease since 1992. These teachers argued that since the context of learning changes so significantly from primary to secondary, even if the attainments recorded in primary classrooms were accurate at the time, they would not necessarily be a reliable guide to the learning characteristics and potential of many of the pupils once they have begun their secondary schooling. They considered it appropriate therefore to consult the records, perhaps around the October break, only to confirm their own judgements. There appeared to be considerable variability in the extent to which headteachers/co-ordinators regarded this as a problem which had to be tackled.

> I still prefer, in the beginning, to make my own judgements. I'm very aware of pupils who come up from the primary having had personality clashes with primary teachers, or maybe have been unhappy with the class that they were in, or any number of reasons for them not performing very well. So I don't like to have set in my head that 'little Bob is a level C' before I even see what little Bob looks like. It is nice to know what kind of mix you've got in your class, so that you don't have a top–heavy or bottom–heavy class. We do try and mix them as best as possible. But, like I say, I would maybe go back to them nearer report time to see if there had been any improvement, or if anybody had gone back the way according to what their primary teacher had said. (English teacher)

It is clear then that while communications in the form of records have certainly improved, the perceptions of some primary staff are correct—the messages are not always understood, trusted or acted upon (Malcolm and Schlapp, 1997). There is still a considerable gap between the sectors which is unlikely to be given much future attention, as most teachers in secondaries indicate that they are now turning their attention and development time towards Higher Still. However, it could be argued that the teacher quoted above is correct: that the contexts of learning are indeed so different that the secondaries might legitimately use the primary records only if and when a checking mechanism is required, and that continuity and progression in learning are best provided for wholly within the new setting, for example, through the application of appropriate assessment and of responsive and flexible teaching methods. In the next section we look at aspects of these within S1/S2.

DEVELOPING AND USING ASSESSMENT WITHIN S1/S2

> The Government believes that every pupil should benefit from a properly structured programme of assessment which is part of the process of learning and teaching… It will be a key aim of the programme that teachers should be supplied with adequate guidance on teaching the curriculum and on assessment. (SED, 1987:3).

In the initial consultation document 'Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: A Policy for the 90s', which set out the basis for the subsequent development of the 5–14 Programme (SED, 1987), inconsistency in the processes and procedures for assessment was identified as a weakness in the infrastructures supporting and monitoring learning. The guidance promised to teachers came in the form of the Assessment Guidelines (SOED, 1991). Rather than present specific details of what should be assessed and by what means, these guidelines set assessment within five procedures already familiar to teachers—planning, teaching, evaluating, recording, and reporting (the 'five boxes')—and highlighted the formative use of assessment as a central component of the teaching and learning process. Schools were encouraged to develop consistent policies towards assessment which would promote its use

as a means of monitoring the progress of each pupil and as a basis for identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their learning with a view to selecting appropriate further experiences for the pupil and to setting realistic and attainable targets. This information was to be shared not only with the individuals concerned and their parents, but also with other teachers as an aid to monitoring progression in learning and planning further action.

Ideally, if assessment is to be developed as an integral part of teaching and learning, the assessment policies and strategies should be considered and should evolve along with the curricular developments. In 1994, we found strong indications that, following a brief period of whole-school awareness-raising, the development of assessment strategies and procedures was delegated to individual subject departments, and the majority of principal teachers in mathematics and English indicated that they would address the issues raised in the assessment guidelines after they had implemented their specific subject guidelines. By 1996, half of the principal teachers of mathematics and English believed that their implementation of the assessment guidelines was now 'well under way'. Just over a third of mathematics teachers expressed the view that implementation was complete compared with 19 per cent of their English language colleagues, confirming the generally expressed view that in this, as in other aspects of the implementation, mathematics was 'further on'. But does implementation mean the same within these two subject areas?

We found that many more English (84 per cent) than mathematics staff (53 per cent) consider that the format of the assessment set out in the guidelines is a useful model, and a very large majority of English staff (92 per cent) feel that there is a need for grade-related criteria which offer descriptors of different qualities of performances at different levels. In mathematics, where materials are matched to levels, and pupils' attainments are evidenced by scores on tests comprising items linked to the materials, fewer indicated a need for grade related criteria (29 per cent). Similarly, concerns were expressed by considerably more English principal teachers (80 per cent as opposed to 44 per cent) at the lack of match between their familiar Standard Grade assessment formats and that of the A to E levels of the 5–14 Programme.

Rather more English (92 per cent) than mathematics principal teachers (62 per cent) felt that their assessment had a high formative element; and similarly, a

Table 4: Changes as a result of the assessment guidelines

(Teachers of mathematics, and English language 1996 — per cent of questionnaire responses)						
	happening		likely to happen		already at a satisfactory level	
	Math.	Eng.	Math.	Eng.	Math.	Eng.
greater uniformity among teachers in assessment methods	37	41	17	39	39	17
more integration of assessment into teaching	31	46	15	32	43	15
a more learner–centred approach to assessment	24	33	24	39	34	19

rather higher proportion (78 per cent as opposed to 49 per cent) felt that more work needed to be done on the implementation of the assessment guidelines. The results of our questionnaire probes into the trends in the changes to assessment practice are presented in Table 4.

Overall, our data suggest that although many teachers of English language have a clearer vision of the formative use of assessment, they are finding it more difficult to assess pupils' attainments in a summative way, using the frameworks of their 5–14 curriculum guidelines, than their colleagues within mathematics, where the structured nature of the subject and the previously-used summative end-of-unit testing procedures fit readily within the framework for attainment and progression set out in the mathematics guidelines. And English staff appeared to be struggling against too superficial and complacent an approach to summative assessment:

> Because what we've discovered in the standardised tests and things that we've made up is that you end up at some point testing comprehension rather than any listening skill. And you'd have just as well have given them a reading comprehension. So what we've agreed to do this year is to provide grades or levels for listening for the school reports, but to make it clear that these are related to performance in comprehension tests, and do not of themselves actually reflect any sort of overall listening. (PT English)

Many are focusing developments on the integration of assessment and recording with learning and teaching:

> We've been in the school's profiling pilot and we've moved away from seeing it as separate from assessment and reporting and teaching and learning strategies. All of these are integrated... We would hope to tie the ends together—the profiling, the assessment and recording, and the learning and teaching, so the pupils see it as much more coherent than they see it at present. Sometimes the teacher has an overview of things and it's better that the pupils have that same understanding. (Principal teacher, English)

And use assessment to evaluate teaching:

> I sometimes use assessment that way. So that, for instance, a piece of work you're expecting a certain quality from the range of pupils in the class, and that quality is not coming through. So then you step back and you think—'what was it that I didn't do or didn't focus on, or didn't explain more carefully?' And then that's what you do, and hopefully it comes through in the finished product. (Principal teacher, English)

In contrast, it was clear from interviews and questionnaire responses that for many mathematics teachers, 'assessment' meant 'summative attainment tests', and that they were comfortable with that restricted view:

> Assessment? Well, yes. We've always had tests in the department. All we've done now is re-structured those so that they reflect the levels. And at any diet of tests, we have three tests running. We have one that covers level C and D. We have one that covers D and E, and one that covers E and beyond E. And the overlap questions are identical. (Principal teacher, mathematics)

In some schools, they had collaborated with their associated primary school staff in devising common tests as end-of-unit assessments which could be applied in either sector, but there were indications that some mathematics staff were struggling with the more formative requirements of the assessment guidelines. Although 62 per cent of principal teachers claimed in the questionnaire that their assessment had a 'high formative element', the interview data indicated that, in the view of many

respondents, assessment is being used formatively if tests result in the accurate placing of pupils according to ability on the appropriate level of materials. And when this had clearly failed to happen? 'I don't know how we get over that one. I really don't,' said one principal teacher. It appeared that the idea of assessment as part of a cycle rather than as an end-point was something that only a few had recognised and were struggling to get to grips with:

> I have to give you the honest answer and say that diagram (the five boxes) keeps coming back to haunt me. I keep thinking, you know, if that is THE ethos of 5–14 then I'm not in deeply enough. We are a department who are committed to regular assessment of our pupils. What we've done is level by level, getting more and more complex. The ethos of the cyclic style, as I say, keeps coming back to haunt me. (Principal teacher, mathematics)

Some who were conscious of failing to address the more formative elements of assessment suggested that this was simply due to other more pressing priorities, '... making sure that our core text is supplemented to fill all the gaps and to cope with things where we feel the text is not good enough, and to bring in the homework and the revisions.' Clearly these activities were less challenging to established practices.

The developments in assessment were intended to help inform teachers about the previous attainments and the potential learning needs of their pupils to enable them to be more responsive to the diversity in these characteristics. Differentiation had been most frequently addressed in both subjects by the introduction of differentiated materials and, as a consequence, the majority of learning support staff considered that differentiation had improved for the less able pupils (78 per cent mathematics and 68 per cent English); rather fewer said it had improved for the more able pupils (55 per cent and 48 per cent respectively). One learning support teacher who had been assisting different departments to produce materials for levels B and C, and extension work for more able pupils in S1, said:

> 5–14 is allowing us to do what we should be doing, which is looking at the curriculum and attempting to make the teachers realise that differentiation is what it is all about.

With respect to changes in teaching strategies, 64 per cent of learning support respondents believed that more flexible teaching methods are now used in S1/S2 in English language departments, and just over half indicated that this was also true of mathematics, although in some departments this was indicated by an increase in individualised learning and, in others, by a decrease. Learning support teachers, who have a cross–curricular overview, were asked whether in their view pupils were experiencing greater continuity as a result of the implementation of the assessment guidelines: 41 per cent responded 'yes'; 45 per cent considered it 'too early to say'. However, just over 60 per cent indicated that they had reviewed their own assessment practices in mathematics and English as a result of 5–14, and 34 per cent that they felt that the assessment guidelines had helped teachers to plan their courses more effectively. However, the range of experiences was clearly diverse. One principal teacher indicated that: 'There is still an attitude of "fresh start needed" by many staff. National testing remains the main means of assessment. Assessment is not used to plan next steps'. Nevertheless, the majority considered that improvements had been achieved, or were yet likely to come about, as a consequence of the use of the assessment guidelines.

DISCUSSION

For those staff willing to engage with the Programme, 5–14 has clearly offered opportunities to address long recognised weaknesses in the early secondary provision: more than 70 per cent of all staff groups indicated that its implementation had 'prompted us to take action on changes we wished to make anyway', and between a half and a third indicated that the activities had been a 'professionally rewarding experience'. Nevertheless, as our data indicate, considerable weaknesses continue to exist in the three key mechanisms which reinforce continuity and progression in the pupils' experiences.

Undoubtedly, some of the most vital information at the points of transition has a strong social element. Both the secondary teachers and the S1 pupils whom we interviewed indicated that the primary pupils' visits are successful as the initial induction into this hierarchically-ordered and unfamiliar social context. Teachers in both sectors fully understand the informal discourse commonly used to discuss the relevant characteristics of, and the potential problems associated with, pupils with respect to learning and control—who is good, bad, difficult or bright. The 5–14 guidelines offer them an alternative framework for professional communications across the sector divide, which is related to the curriculum and levels of attainment. However, the formal language of the 5–14 curriculum is new and unfamiliar. Although the language of the descriptors of the attainment targets is comprehensible on one level, many teachers expressed the need to establish, through curriculum-focused discussions and exemplification, exactly what the descriptors mean.

Mathematics teachers appear able to tie the meanings narrowly down to coverage of content and performance in tests. They therefore find less that requires discussion. Their English language colleagues, grappling with the complexities they recognise in learning within their subject, find the level descriptors more problematical. They feel the need to negotiate agreement on meanings and to see exemplifications of these. However, because of the shortage of time for regular and extended cross-sector conversations, the opportunities for exploration and adoption of common meanings are curtailed, and the staff of learning support play an increasingly important role as the carriers and interpreters of key information. Prior to the introduction of the 5–14 Programme, most learning support teachers had a well-established role with regard to pupils with specific learning or social and emotional difficulties. However, the implementation of 5–14 has clearly formalised and extended their level of involvement at the interface between P7 and S1. The establishment of learning and teaching policy groups reported in some schools, and the positive responses by teachers reported by the SCCC to their teaching and learning initiatives (SCCC, 1996;1997), also give hope that the contexts for optimisation of learning rather than the traditions of the subject areas are at last being given consideration and some degree of priority in the secondary schools.

A second area of difficulty is the nature and content of the primary school records and their consistency across schools. Over the period of the introduction of the 5–14 Programme, which has encouraged the formation of co-operative associated school groups (ASGs) or cluster groups, there have been other policy initiatives which have promoted the autonomy of schools, particularly devolved school management and school development planning. The dynamics of the development of associations of groups of schools as they deal with the competing forces which drive them towards both autonomy and confederation has proved fertile ground for researchers (see, for example, Thorp, 1991; Busher and Hodgkinson, 1995). There is as yet little information available on the extent to which the different kinds of cluster groups have been established across Scotland and the circumstances in which they are proving effective in finding the balance between collaboration and autonomy. However, it does appear that very small primary schools are sharing procedures in

a more co-operative way than larger schools where increasing autonomy from the local authorities has been relished. Within cluster groups, democratic procedures for agreeing the adoption of common procedures such as the format for reporting are not well established, and the development of a variety of reporting schemes to suit the internal purposes of individual primary schools has inevitably led to the diversity of information which is offered to secondary staff. The report Improving Achievement in Scottish Schools (SOEID, 1996) recommended the development of a national standard transfer form as a means of ensuring effectiveness and consistency in the information which passed between the sectors; and, in an attempt to deal with a similar problem south of the border, English primary schools have been offered similar advice from a central authority (SCAA, 1996).

The third area of difficulty concerns the teachers' understanding and use of assessment. Although the terminology of formative assessment has clearly entered the vocabulary of the secondary teachers, there is evidence of a lack of clarity on the purpose and use of assessment which appears to be related to confusion over summative and formative approaches. In secondary schools, there has been a well-established culture of summative assessment—end of unit, end of section, end of term, end of session. Traditionally, assessment meant tests. Tests are for passing or failing, and the most important ones are used to sift and sort. Experience of innovation has shown that it is easy to re-label old practices and disguise them in the rhetoric of the new. The introduction of formative assessment in its fullest form requires nothing less than a paradigm shift for teachers (Simpson and Hayward, 1998). It is not surprising, therefore, that although it is possible to find innovative examples of the application of the concept of the cyclical interaction of assessment and teaching, and of the involvement of pupils in the setting of their learning goals and their informed monitoring of their progress, these practices are not yet widespread (Simpson, 1997b).

The forces acting against the improvement of practices likely to improve continuity of pupils' experiences are significant. The principal teachers are formidable gatekeepers, and negative attitudes or poor vision and leadership on the part of individuals can be the key determinant of the quality of action and achievement of whole departments. The initiative has been considerably under-resourced, curtailing the face-to-face interactions which are essential for the development of common language, understanding and trust. Nevertheless, there is evidence from our study that, in the early stages of S1, many secondary teachers are now more alert and responsive to the different levels of performance—as indicated by the assessment of pupils or as communicated by learning support staff—that there has been a diversification of teaching methods to cater for a variety of attainment levels and different needs, and that the contents of the S1/S2 courses are being revised to offer a coherent two-year course. These changes in themselves are likely to enhance the continuity and progression of pupils' learning in S1/S2, but they are not yet firmly established in many mathematics and English departments, and the other subject areas lag well behind. It is not auspicious for the continuing improvement of pupils' learning experiences in S1/S2 that the impending introduction of the Higher Still programme is now the acknowledged priority in secondary schools, re-instating the importance of the subject focus, the curriculum specialist and summative assessment.

The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

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