

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment launches Everybody Counts! a consultation on mathematics in post-primary education

This week sees the start of Everybody Counts! - a consultation process about mathematics in post-primary education, organised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. To encourage a wide participation in the consultation, and to give particular encouragement to students in schools and in third level to offer their views, a special free text service has been set-up for comments on mathematics and suggestions for change. Students, parents and teachers alike can simply free text the word 'maths' followed by their comment to 50100.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has sent a discussion paper entitled *Review of Mathematics in Post-Primary Education* to every post-primary school in the country as part of its review of maths. The review comes at a time when there are questions being raised about the uptake of higher level mathematics, particularly in the Leaving Certificate, and about the standards of mathematical achievement in state examinations and in international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The review takes place against the background of a revised curriculum in primary schools, and the arrival of students into the first-year of post-primary school who have approached mathematics in new ways.

The paper, together with the consultation questionnaire, is also on the way to industry and business interests, to the science and engineering departments of Universities and Institutes of Technology and to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs at Forfás. 'Mathematics is taken by every student in post-primary school', said Dr. Anne Looney, CEO of NCCA, 'and mathematical skills are also used in other areas of the curriculum, from business studies to home economics, from chemistry to physical education. So it's important for school success. But increasingly, mathematics is becoming important for life success as well. Thinking mathematically and applying problem-solving skills may become the survival skills for the knowledge society. As a result, mathematics education in schools is coming under scrutiny and Ireland needs to be part of this global spotlighting of mathematics'.

She continued, 'for this reason, the NCCA have also commissioned a study of what's happening in mathematics in other countries. The paper was co-written by an Irish-based academic, Dr. Paul Conway of the education department in UCC and an Irish researcher working in the USA, Dr. Finbarr Sloane of the National Science Foundation in Washington and Arizona State University. The paper gives us an insight into how other countries are approaching the reform of mathematics education, and gives us some clear indicators of the shape of 21st century mathematics. In this, the Hamilton year, when Ireland celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth of its most famous mathematician, William Rowan Hamilton, we can look back with pride on what has been achieved here so far – almost all students take mathematics to the end of upper secondary education, for example. But now we need to look forward – helping students to make more of the mathematics they study, and ensuring that the

mathematics they do study will serve them well in further studies, and in civic, social and economic life’.

The consultation period will last throughout November. A report on the emerging issues will be published in February 2006.

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Copies of all documents are available by clicking the link below.

<http://www.ncca.ie/eng/index.asp?locID=423&docID=-1>