

PROGRESS REPORT BY AFGHANISTAN PARTICIPANTS

Workshop Week 3: 2 December 2006

1 How is the new scope and sequence for your subject different from the existing content?

The vast majority of participants believe that the new syllabuses will be a significant improvement on existing documents. Some participants acknowledged the importance of the curriculum framework and an agreed syllabus template in improving consistency and reducing ambiguity. Comments included that new syllabuses will be richer and more interesting, will be comprehensive, will be more relevant to the modern world, and will meet international standards. The addition of new subjects will also enrich the curriculum.

There was general agreement that the organisation of content will be improved and that in particular there should now be better coherence between subjects and improved continuity between grades. The content should also be better sequenced than before with consistent progress from simple to complex and will develop more independent students.

Few participants expressed concern that it was difficult to see the relevance of some of the documents provided from other countries, while other groups drew on these materials quite substantially.

Several participants mentioned the issue of repetition or duplication of material, and suggested that this should be carefully monitored so that any material that is repeated is made relevant to each individual subject.

A comment was also made that it will only be possible to assess the value of the new syllabuses after they have been implemented.

2 What questions, issues or challenges does the new scope and sequence raise for the Ministry of Education?

There was clear and strong consensus on a number of important issues which need to be addressed by the Ministry of Education if these syllabuses are to be successfully implemented. Many participants implied that the Ministry's work will need to be at a higher level and that the implementation of these syllabuses will have to be carefully planned. The comments refer in particular to the following four essential resources:

Firstly – textbooks. There is a need to identify the best, most highly qualified textbook writers. They will need to understand the new syllabuses and be able to produce textbooks that accurately reflect the syllabuses and are interesting and attractive so that students are engaged in the subject. This might require a process of selecting textbook writers that is more competitive and transparent than the current one.

Textbook writers will need to be thoroughly familiar with the syllabuses and with the teaching and learning methodologies that are appropriate for these syllabuses. The work of textbook writers will therefore need to be carefully audited and monitored.

It is essential that there be timely distribution and availability of new textbooks. However, several participants also recommended that attention also be given to the production of other material to supplement textbooks.

Secondly – teachers. As with textbook writers, teachers need to know and understand the content and requirements of the new syllabuses. This will require changes to the programs that prepare new teachers and a carefully considered program to ensure that existing teachers are trained in the contents of the syllabuses and in the most appropriate teaching methodologies. This program should extend to ensuring that there is an effective way of supervising teachers as they implement the new syllabuses.

There was a concern expressed by some participants that teachers will not be able to acquire the advanced skills necessary to implement these syllabuses. This is an important issue and there was a clear suggestion that the Ministry will need to adopt a carefully planned strategy to take this into account.

Thirdly – facilities in schools. Participants frequently mentioned the need to improve facilities in schools generally, and specific mention was made of science laboratories and libraries.

Fourthly – time. Several participants mentioned that the time allocation specified for their syllabuses in the curriculum framework should be respected. There was also reference to the need to standardise the duration of lessons and of the school day, and that the current number of hours of instruction may need to be increased. Participants also mentioned the difficulty that too many shifts in schools causes in reducing the number of hours of instruction available.

It is important that over the remaining time at this workshop participants give particular attention to constructive suggestions about how these very important issues can be addressed.

3 In completing your work, how helpful have the international consultants been?

The general consensus among participants was that the Jordanian consultants have been extremely effective in supporting the work of the groups and that their assistance has been very cooperative and professional. Some suggestions were that consistent, full time attendance would have benefited the work of the groups and that better solutions should have been found to translation problems that occurred in some groups. It would also have been appreciated if Jordanian materials translated into Dari could have been available at the beginning of the workshop.

Participants generally appreciated the assistance and support of the other international consultants and reported that their advice was very professional and extremely well-informed. Participants agreed that all these consultants approached their work enthusiastically and with an 'open heart'. Their presentations were clear and informative and gave clear guidance about how to write a syllabus. One participant even felt that the consultants were empathetic and acted as though they had lived in Afghanistan for many years.

While appreciating the ideas the international consultants shared with the groups, the participants suggested that they pay special attention to the specific context of Afghanistan and to what is feasible on short-, medium, and long-term.

It was also suggested that international consultants had not visited all groups. This was not possible in any substantive way given the number of groups and the number of consultants. In some cases, such as Islamic Studies, the consultants did not have expertise in the area and discussions were conducted in Arabic, so time spent on this task would have been unproductive. However, feedback will be given to all groups once the drafts have been completed.

Please rate the help provided by consultants on the following scale:

5 = Excellent, 4 = Good, 3 = OK, 2 = Poor, 1 = Very poor

	5	4	3	2	1
Jordanian consultants	70.1%	18.8%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%
International consultants	48.0%	44.0%	8.0%	0%	0%

4 (a) Do you have any other comments on the workshop so far?

Participants generally felt that the workshop was good and met their expectations and needs. One frequently expressed reservation was the amount of time available to complete the amount of work involved in developing a syllabus.

With respect to this matter, everyone would agree that more time would be of benefit. The fact is that, for various reasons, more time is not possible. The output of this workshop has already been extraordinary, and with continued effort for the next week substantial documentation can still be produced.

A number of specific criticisms and comments about the workshop were also made:

- Materials for the workshop, including Jordanian textbooks, should have been translated and prepared in advance so work could have commenced immediately
- There should be better management and organisation of data entry and access to computers and printers
- Access to internet was essential but not always available
- There is an urgent need for more translators and typist.

(b) Please rate your opinion of the workshop so far

	5	4	3	2	1
Workshop overall	28.6%	64.3%	7.1%	0%	0%

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