

RECOMMENDATION No. 50
concerning the
PREPARATION AND ISSUING OF GENERAL SECONDARY
SCHOOL CURRICULA

The International Conference on Public Education,

Convened in Geneva by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Bureau of Education, having assembled on the sixth of July, nineteen hundred and sixty, for its twenty-third session, adopts on the fourteenth of July, nineteen hundred and sixty, the following Recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering the interest shown in the problem of school syllabuses by international bodies of an educational nature, and in particular by the International Advisory Committee on the School Curriculum set up by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

Considering Recommendation No. 46 to the Ministries of Education on the preparation and issuing of the primary school curriculum, adopted on the fifteenth of July, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight, by the International Conference on Public Education at its twenty-first session,

Considering that the present intensive development of education at secondary level entails not only structural changes but also the readjustment of school curricula and syllabuses in the light of a great variety of national and international needs,

Considering that the reports submitted to the Conference by the Ministries of Education show that more than half the countries are at present working on the preparation or revision of secondary level curricula,

Considering that general secondary education, which was formerly the privilege of a minority, is now becoming available to an increasingly large number of children whose intellectual ability, social background and future occupation may be very varied,

Considering that the extension of secondary education to a wider range of children should not lead to a lower level of education and culture,

Considering that general secondary education should not be limited to the intellectual, moral, physical and aesthetic fields but should also prepare young people for life and for socially useful work,

Considering that the rapid progress of science and technology calls for broader modes of thought and new modes of action,

Considering that the total sum of human knowledge has increased, and is still increasing at an ever quickening pace, in the fields of science, literature and art,

Considering that the most widely accepted concept of general secondary education is based on a proper balance between the humanities and the sciences,

Considering that a recommendation of universal import cannot cover the many diverse theoretical aspects of the problem of general secondary school curricula, and that such a recommendation, to be effective, should be confined to the statement of concrete practicable measures,

Considering that, in spite of similar aspirations, countries in very different positions must reach varied solutions of the problem of the preparation and issuing of general secondary school curricula,

Submits to the Ministries of Education of the different countries the following Recommendation:

General principles governing the preparation of curricula

1) When drawing up general secondary school curricula, the following points must be taken into consideration: a) the various aims assigned to this type of education; b) its structure, whether uniform in character or organized in stages and divisions; c) the relative importance to be given to each subject or group of subjects; d) the environment in which the pupils live and receive their education; e) the pupils' capacity for assimilation and the needs and interests of their ages and sex.

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2) In the absence of absolute principles which may be accepted and profitably applied in all countries, it is nevertheless recommended that a proper balance should be maintained in the relative importance given in curricula and syllabuses to such things as the pupils' intellectual, moral, social, manual, physical and aesthetic education, in order to ensure the complete and harmonious development of the individual child.

3) In order to achieve this balance, it is desirable to bear in mind when drawing up curricula the varied contribution which each subject can make not only to the pupil's store of factual knowledge, but also to the development of his personality and to his attitude to the world around him.

4) It is important to give moral education the emphasis demanded by present-day conditions and to ask all teachers to stress the moral and social implications of what they teach and of the situations with which pupils may be confronted within and without the school community.

5) The dual tendency to give more room in general secondary education to work and knowledge of a practical and vocational nature and to intensify the study of general subjects in secondary technical and vocational establishments should be encouraged.

6) It is important when drawing up syllabuses to stress, though without adding a new subject to the curriculum, the contribution which the teaching of some subjects can make to good relations, peace and understanding between nations and races.

7) General secondary school syllabuses should be considered as the natural sequel to those used in the primary school; it is therefore desirable that at the beginning of general secondary education and upon entrance to the upper stage, where one exists, allowance should be made in the curriculum for transition, in order that pupils may be spared excessive strain in readjusting themselves, which is a source of discouragement and failure.

8) When preparing general secondary school curricula it is advisable to take into account, as far as possible without detriment to the normal educational development of the majority of pupils, the requirements of post-secondary establishments.

Principles relating to the structure of education

9) In countries where secondary studies cover two stages, curricula should take into account the aims allotted to each of these stages, the first being more general in character and constituting the logical continuation

and expansion of primary education, while the second provides an opportunity of giving prominence to some particular category of subjects and may act to some extent as a preparation for further education.

10) In countries where the first stage of secondary education, either wholly or in part, is a period of general culture and guidance common to all the pupils — a solution which deserves to become more widespread — the content and arrangement of the curriculum should allow for the pupils' choice of course and for selection by the teachers or specialists responsible for it.

11) In countries where secondary studies comprise several divisions, and where the syllabuses used take into account the particular aims of each of these divisions, it is important to remember the more general aims of secondary education as a whole; in the same way, in countries where the curriculum provides a choice of subjects in order to take into account the pupils' needs, interests and abilities, it should be ensured that this differentiation does not take place to the detriment of subjects which are indispensable to the pupils' wider education.

12) In countries where general secondary education does not comprise divisions and is therefore more uniform in character, it is desirable to allow for the greatest possible adaptation of the curriculum to the pupils' needs, interests and abilities.

13) Courses should be so designed that at various points during their secondary schooling pupils may pass from one division to another or from general to specialized education and vice versa.

Principles relating to the content of syllabuses

14) Syllabuses should be divided up into years of study, taking into account the appropriate objectives for each grade, the abilities, achievements and interests of pupils of various ages, and the actual time available for instruction.

15) In order to be effective, general secondary school syllabuses should be within the capacity of the pupils in the classes for which they are intended.

16) The content of the syllabus for any given subject should be in line with the particular aims pursued in the teaching of this subject and with the general aims of the stage or division in which it is taught.

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17) Fixing the relative importance to be given to each subject is a vital aspect of the preparation of curricula, and the allotments made should be periodically re-examined in the light of changing social conditions and the findings of recent educational research.

18) It is clear that in the different divisions of general secondary education the subjects which constitute the core of the division must take the largest place, but this should not prevent other subjects from receiving the attention due to them, even when the secondary course terminates in a highly specialized examination.

19) It is desirable to ensure that the syllabuses for the different subjects are not separated into water-tight compartments, but that full use is made of the close relations which may exist between different subjects and of the opportunities they offer for supplementing each other, always providing that any unnecessary overlapping and repetition are avoided.

20) The fairly common tendency to overload curricula and syllabuses, either by the introduction of new subjects or by expanding the content of each separate subject, presents a real danger; to avoid this, the introduction of new subject matter into the curriculum should be offset by the removal of other matter which has become of less importance, and syllabuses should offer a selection of essential topics rather than an accumulation of material.

Drafting procedure

21) Whichever authority is responsible for general secondary education, the preparation of curricula for this type of education should be the work of specialized bodies on which teachers should always be represented.

22) It is essential that the preparation and revision of the syllabuses for each of the subjects taught at secondary level should be carried out mainly by specialists in the subjects, concerned, with the reservation that in lower secondary education it may be preferable for several related subjects to be taught by the same person.

23) When syllabuses are prepared by groups of specialists, it is desirable to ensure the coordination of these different groups, which should base their work on common principles and should consider themselves as constituent parts of the same whole.

24) Work on the preparation of syllabuses should be coordinated not only as regards the different subjects in the general secondary school curriculum, but also in relation to preceding education, subsequent education and parallel types of secondary education; to achieve this coordination, it is essential to call in teachers from other branches (primary education, teacher training, technical and vocational education, higher education).

25) It is important that the authorities responsible for the preparation of curricula should be able to call upon the advice of specialists in didactics and in the psychology of the adolescent.

26) In order to link the school more closely with its cultural, social and economic environment, it is advisable that the parents and representatives of the different bodies which for various reasons are interested in general secondary education should have the opportunity of expressing their views on the curriculum.

27) In view of the importance of psycho-pedagogical research in the preparation and revision of secondary school syllabuses, it is desirable that such research should be encouraged in suitably equipped centres with the cooperation, as far as possible, of teachers who are interested in this type of work.

28) Authorities responsible for the preparation of curricula should allow for a preliminary period of investigation, bearing, among other things, on: a) children's characteristics and rate of development at an age affected by the problems of adolescence; b) significant scientific progress in the various fields covered by the subjects taught; c) up to date information provided by both general and special didactics; d) the scientific and educational training of the teachers involved; e) current trends in the cultural, social and economic fields; f) comparative studies of the syllabuses used in other countries; g) the result of experiments carried out in this connection either within the country or abroad.

29) Before curricula are finally accepted, they should if possible be tried out under expert supervision either in experimental schools or in carefully selected ordinary schools; in any case they should be introduced gradually, in order to facilitate such modification as may prove necessary.

Issuing procedure

30) In countries where curricula are issued by a central authority it is desirable that sufficient latitude should be given for their adaptation to regional or local requirements.

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31) In countries with a decentralized educational system it is advisable to encourage the various authorities responsible for issuing syllabuses to cooperate among themselves with a view to eliminating all unnecessary differences in the syllabuses for the various regions and thus to minimize the disadvantages arising from pupils' change of domicile.

32) Although there are disadvantages in revising syllabuses at too close or too distant intervals, it should not be forgotten that the scientific progress achieved in some branches of knowledge requires that the corresponding syllabuses should be brought up to date more frequently than the syllabuses of other subjects.

Application

33) In order to stress the close connection between method and content, it is desirable for curricula to include a brief account of the basic conception of the teaching of each subject and suggestions for teaching it based on the work done in the fields of educational psychology and experimental education.

34) The issuing of new curricula should be the occasion of courses lectures, pedagogical meetings, study groups, articles in the press, etc., so that teachers may be informed of the principles underlying the proposed changes.

35) The pedagogical training of secondary school teachers should include both theoretical and practical familiarity with the syllabuses they will be called upon to use.

36) It is desirable that syllabuses should be considered as a guide and a concrete aid rather than as a rigid set of regulations excluding due adaptation and reasonable liberty for the teacher.

37) All suitable steps should be taken to ensure that textbooks should correspond as far as possible to the new curricula, though without ignoring the expense which this involves.

38) It is desirable to see that when curricula are changed the schools have at their disposal the special accommodation, equipment and the various teaching aids (laboratory apparatus, audio-visual aids, etc.) required for the application of the new curricula.

39) In the application of the syllabus for any particular subject, it is important to remember the needs of those pupils whose rate of progress is slower or faster than that of the average; this objective can be achieved in a variety of ways including both special attention inside the classroom and extra activities outside school.

International aspects of the problem

40) The increasing amount of movement from one country to another accentuates the problem of the equivalence of secondary level studies and qualifications; although no standardization of curricula is envisaged, an attempt should be made to achieve sufficient uniformity to facilitate the recognition of secondary studies pursued abroad.

41) Contacts aimed at achieving greater uniformity in the terminology used to designate the subjects taught, or at enabling the preparation of comparative studies on the basic resemblances and differences between the curricula used in the different countries, should help to solve the problem of the equivalence of studies.

42) As in the case of school textbook collections, international collections of curricula would be of prime interest not only to specialists in the preparation of curricula but also to education authorities and teachers; national, regional or international educational documentation centres should therefore be enabled to keep collections of this kind up to date.

43) In plans for technical assistance, either national or international, it is desirable to include, for countries requesting such aid, the appointment of specialists who would play an active part in the preparation of curricula.