# Your curriculum journey

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# Your curriculum journey

Schools involved in the Curriculum Network have found it helpful to determine the direction of their curriculum journey by focusing on three key questions:

- What are you trying to achieve?

- How will you organise learning?

- How will you evaluate your curriculum?

The activities in this section of the website will help you answer these questions. They have been designed in partnership with schools to help curriculum planners take stock, set priorities and plan for the future. If you are some way along the curriculum development path, you may feel that some of the activities are quite simple. However, many schools have found that going back to first principles has helped them see their curriculum differently and recognise new possibilities.

Please email us at curriculumnetwork@qcda.gov.uk to let us know how you use these activities and any others that you design. We're keen to learn from your experiences and share your ideas and feedback with others.

# Before you begin...

Some advice from a school that has already been there: Chris Chapman from Haywood Engineering College in Stoke-on-Trent, part of the Creative Partnerships Curriculum Network, gives his top 10 tips for creating an innovative curriculum.

- Consider where you're going before you think about how you're going to get there. Identify the aims and outcomes of your curriculum.

- Audit current provision, content and structure – what is going to prevent it delivering on your aims? What areas of strength could be developed further?

- Research, plunder and critically evaluate a range of curriculum models. There are some fantastic, radical and creative models of curriculum design – but remember that what works for one school may not work for yours.

- Develop a model that is personalised towards the needs of your school and your learners. Don't be afraid to think outside the box in terms of how the curriculum can be structured.

- Consider carefully the social and cultural issues and challenges that the 21st century poses for young people. This is, after all, a curriculum for the future.

- Engage with the views of staff, students and parents. Give the whole school community a chance to engage with and have ownership of the curriculum design process.

- Empower your learners through the design process and the learning programmes you implement.

- Give licence to innovate and see this as an opportunity to develop and build creatively upon the good practice of your staff. Form an interdisciplinary staff (and student) working group.

- Start small scale, with pilot projects, taking an action research approach. Don't try to do too much at once.

- Map in robust evaluation procedures with a view to moving towards your curriculum vision.

# What do you want to achieve?

*'If you don't know where you're going, you're unlikely to end up there.'*
**Forrest Gump**

The first step in your curriculum journey is to be really clear about what you are trying to achieve. What are you educating your young people for? What do they need to know, to understand, to be able to do and to be like? Being clear about the aims of your curriculum will drive the decisions you make about organising learning and enable you to evaluate the impact of changes on your learners.

The aims you identify for the curriculum in your school should reflect the national curriculum aims. These were reviewed during the development of the new secondary curriculum to make them more accessible, and although they are only statutory at key stages 3 and 4 the revised aims are useful for all schools. They state that the curriculum should enable all young people to become:
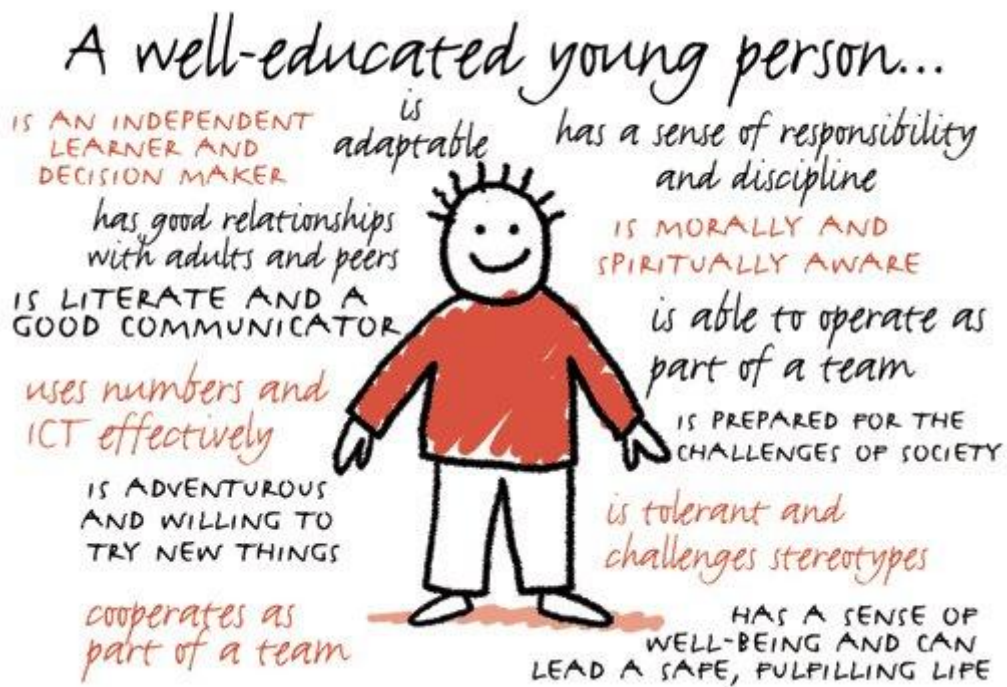
- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve

- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives

- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

You can read more about the knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes encompassed by these in *The aims of the curriculum*. How would you add to these core aims to personalise them for your learners and reflect your local context?

## Activity: Identifying priorities
What skills and qualities would you like to see in your learners?

Working in small groups, ask colleagues to draw a picture of a young person in the middle of a large sheet of paper and to write words around the picture to describe a well-educated young person.

A well-educated young person...

IS AN INDEPENDENT LEARNER AND DECISION MAKER

is adaptable

has a sense of responsibility and discipline

has good relationships with adults and peers

IS MORALLY AND SPIRITUALLY AWARE

IS LITERATE AND A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

is able to operate as part of a team

uses numbers and ICT effectively

IS PREPARED FOR THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIETY

IS ADVENTUROUS AND WILLING TO TRY NEW THINGS

is tolerant and challenges stereotypes

cooperates as part of a team

HAS A SENSE OF WELL-BEING AND CAN LEAD A SAFE, FULFILLING LIFE

Display the pictures and words around the room. Do most of the words that your colleagues have used relate to skills, knowledge or attitudes and attributes? Ask each group to draw a line from each word or phrase on their drawing to the appropriate part of the body (a hand for skills, the head for knowledge and understanding, the heart for attitudes and attributes).

Taking the characteristics in turn, decide whether each is:

- green – seen in the majority of learners (an area of strength)

- amber – seen in many learners but not particularly strong

- red – only seen in a few learners (an area for development).

Based on this summary of strengths and weaknesses, what should be the priorities for your curriculum development work?

In consultation with colleagues, learners, governors and parents, use the related document *Specific aims for curriculum development* to record your thoughts. These specific aims will become the starting point for your curriculum plans and evaluation.

## Activity: Visualising success

Whether you have identified skills development, aspects of personal development or knowledge and understanding as your priorities for curriculum improvement, you need to think about what success in meeting these aims might look like.

To give you a clear picture of what you are trying to achieve in terms of each of the specific aims you have identified for your curriculum, write a description of:

• what your learners are like at the moment

• what you hope they will be like as a result of your curriculum development work.

The example below shows before and after descriptions from a school that wanted to improve its learners' teamwork skills.

**Specific aim: Improving learners' teamwork skills**

| At the moment, the majority of our learners: | When we have achieved our aim, the majority of learners will: |
|---|---|
| • would rather work on their own than as part of a team<br><br>• dislike working with people outside their immediate friendship group<br><br>• are either over-confident and take over or are too nervous to join in<br><br>• don't listen to others' views<br><br>• find it hard to agree on anything<br><br>• don't adapt their behaviour to suit different roles and situations<br><br>• are inconsiderate and even rude when providing feedback. | • happily work with others, including those outside their friendship group<br><br>• be able to work confidently and sensitively as part of a team<br><br>• listen to and take account of different views<br><br>• be able to manage discussions and reach agreement<br><br>• adapt to different contexts and roles<br><br>• provide constructive support and feedback to others. |

Using the related document, *Visualising success*, complete a chart like this for each of your specific aims.

# How will you organise learning?

A well-designed curriculum is organised to achieve its aims. It:

- helps every learner to make progress, building on their experiences both within and outside of school

- is based on a clear and shared understanding of how young people learn and provides for the full range of capabilities and aspirations

- provides a coherent and relevant set of learning experiences

- provides opportunities to learn in a range of places and uses expertise from outside the teaching staff to enrich learning

- uses time flexibly to meet learning needs

- provides opportunities for learners to experience different learning approaches, including through subject disciplines, thematic approaches and areas of study of their own choice

- provides opportunities for learners to learn on their own, in a team and in a large group

- includes global, national, local and personal dimensions

- reflects and makes use of current technology.

When thinking about how to organise your curriculum, it is important to take into account the entire planned learning experience. This includes the lessons that learners have during the school day, but also recognises how much young people learn from routines, events, the extended school day and activities that take place out of school.

## Activity: Seeing the big picture

To help schools reflect on all the components of their curriculum, QCDA has developed a curriculum big picture (www.qcda.gov.uk/5856.aspx) that illustrates the idea of the curriculum as the entire planned learning experience. For more ideas on how you might use this, you could watch the film of Mick Waters, Director of Curriculum at QCDA, talking through the big picture.

Take a look at the big picture with colleagues and focus in particular on the middle section (how learning can be organised).

- To what extent does coverage of subjects dominate curriculum planning in your school? How could other components of the curriculum have a greater influence?

- How flexible are you in the way you organise learning?

- How well do you personalise the curriculum to meet the needs of your learners?

The big picture highlights seven components of the curriculum to consider when planning learning:

- lessons

- locations

- environment

- events

- routines

- extended hours

- out-of-school learning.

What does each of these mean to your school? Do you make the most of their potential to improve the outcomes your learners achieve?

Work through the related document *The components of the curriculum*, which gives a clear definition of each of the components in turn and summarises points that other schools have discovered about their potential impact. Add your own thoughts about the impact on learning of each component in your own school. When thinking about how to improve the way you organise learning, which components of the curriculum do you need to focus on?

## Activity: Personalising the curriculum

There are many aspects of the curriculum about which you can make choices that will help you move towards a more personalised, flexible curriculum that better meets the needs, interests and aspirations of your learners. These include the way you use time,

staff and space for learning, the way you involve learners in curriculum decisions, teaching approaches, learning activities, and assessment.

Many schools have found that working through the charts in the related document *Considering your resources* helps them reflect on their current curriculum and how they might organise their resources and teaching and assessment approaches more effectively to help them better meet their aims. Can you use it to identify where you are now on the continuum and where you need to be in order to achieve your vision for your learners?

## Activity: Creating a curriculum tree

You should already have a clear picture of what you want to achieve for your learners and will know the sort of things you need to teach based on the national curriculum content. But have you tried to make the connection between the two? How are you going to achieve the outcomes you want through the different elements of the national curriculum programmes of study?

Many schools are finding it helpful to think of:

- the national curriculum content as the leaves of a tree

- the skills, attitudes and attributes you want to develop in learners as the roots.

The related document, *A curriculum tree*, shows how this might look. The challenge is to look at both the leaves and the roots – what you have to teach and the outcomes you want to achieve – and to see how you can make the connection between the two by designing effective learning experiences. These learning experiences form the trunk of the tree: the activities, lessons and events that link the leaves to the roots.

Challenge colleagues from different year groups to fill in the leaves and roots for their year group. Then ask them to take one leaf and one or two roots and to think creatively about what learning activity they could design to connect the two. Ask them to think about:

- the leaves (content) – what are the key learning objectives?

- the roots (outcomes) – what wider skills do they want to promote?

- the trunk (learning experiences) – what learning activity are they going to plan? How long will this take and how will time be organised? Who needs to be involved?

Where will the learning take place? How does this link to other subjects or prior learning?

As the *Curriculum tree case studies* ([www.qcda.gov.uk/16891.aspx](www.qcda.gov.uk/16891.aspx)) show in the related document, some schools have used the idea of a curriculum tree as the starting point for completely rethinking the way they organise learning.

# How will you evaluate your curriculum?

If you want to know that your curriculum development work is having the desired impact on your learners, you need to establish a clear baseline and then carry out regular, planned evaluations to check the progress of your work. This will help you to recognise your successes and highlight areas of your curriculum that could still be improved.

As well as evaluating the important aspects of attainment captured in national assessment and qualifications, schools need to consider what other outcomes are important and monitor how well the curriculum is performing against these wider goals. An effective curriculum journey is an ongoing development that uses information gathered through evaluations to keep the curriculum exciting, relevant and up to date.

## Activity: Compiling a baseline

To know whether your curriculum development work is making a difference to your learners, you need to be able to compare before and after evidence.

As a starting point for evaluating your curriculum development work, compile baseline information about your learners that relates to your vision for what you want them to achieve. What are your learners like now? How do you know?

At this point it can also be helpful to think about trends in relation to your baseline. What will your learners be like in five years' time if you are really pleased with the way your new curriculum is working? What will they be like if you are satisfied? And what will they be like if you are unhappy with the outcomes you see?

Some schools have found it helpful to ask different staff to complete the related document *Degrees of success,* which addresses these three questions and can be a useful tool for discussion.

## Activity: Considering a range of measures

Many schools are very good at analysing the information they have about learners' achievements in subjects that are tested externally, either through national curriculum tests or qualifications. However, your curriculum priorities are likely to be much broader than this. What other measures do you need to have in place to help you determine the progress your learners are making?

Working with colleagues, agree what evidence you need to collect to show progress for each of your aims for curriculum development. Remember that you only need to collect evidence that is directly relevant to each aim. For example, if you want your learners to have enquiring minds and be independent thinkers, you might collect information on the number and type of questions they ask, their willingness to contribute and their ability to work independently.

When collecting evidence, try to translate qualitative information into quantitative, measurable data. If only a minority of your class can do something, is it less than 40 per cent? Less than 20 per cent? The more specific your measures of performance, the more likely it is that you will be able to demonstrate a link between your curriculum changes and their impact.

## Activity: Collecting people's views

The best way to demonstrate the progress you are making is to let the curriculum developments speak for themselves – to be self-advocating. The words of those directly involved, particularly learners, are often the most powerful evidence of the impact of change. As well as collecting evidence from learners' work, presentations, displays and performances, you could consider:

- asking learners to take digital photographs to show what they think or feel about issues

- capturing discussions and comments using a digital dictaphone

- asking learners to draw a picture expressing their views and then to write a sentence or notes explaining the drawing

- using circle time to involve learners in planning and reflecting on curriculum change

- using learning journals to help pupils reflect critically on their learning and decision making

- creating a pupils' curriculum taskforce in which learners work alongside teachers to evaluate curriculum changes

- introducing interacting voting systems to get large-scale feedback from learners.

A range of stakeholders, including governors, parents and Ofsted, can also provide valuable views and information to help you evaluate your curriculum development.

You could use the related document *Collecting people's views* to help you make notes on how you are going to collect the views of each group, including learners.

## Activity: Completing an evaluation plan

When and how often you collect evidence will depend on:

- the type of information you are collecting

- when you need information to make decisions about moving forward.

As a team, consider when you need to evaluate your work over the next year. Talk with colleagues about the way you collect, record and analyse evidence at the moment. Can you tap into or develop systems already in place? Who will be involved in and take responsibility for each aspect of evaluation? How often will you sit down together to look at the information you collect, identify trends, agree key messages and change plans if necessary?

Other professionals, such as colleagues, staff from other schools, the local authority or independent advisers, can make a valuable contribution to evaluating the success of curriculum development. Consider using:

- internal review – inviting others who work at your school to review a specific part of your curriculum development at one of its milestones

- external review – asking representatives from other schools to review aspects of your curriculum

- formal review – inviting an accrediting or approving agency to review your curriculum.

Based on your discussions about what evidence to collect, how to collect it, when to evaluate and who will take responsibility, complete an evaluation plan, from the related documents, to share with colleagues. You could either complete this as it stands or modify it to meet the particular requirements of your curriculum development work.

## Activity: Developing an evaluation portfolio

Many curriculum innovations are well documented and reported by schools, but often the reports focus on activities rather than outcomes. One way to become a better self-advocate for your curriculum is to develop an evaluation portfolio from which you can extract the evidence you need to tell a convincing story.

A good evaluation portfolio encourages you to collect evidence regularly and includes contributions from everyone involved. It focuses on outcomes rather than activities and, as such, is a good source of information for internal reviews, peer review and reporting, the self-evaluation form and external reviews and inspections.

Talk with colleagues about what you might include in your evaluation portfolio.

- What are the key points in your curriculum development work? What evidence of achievement are you planning to collect at these points?

- What format will this evidence be in? How could you best present it in your portfolio?

- What type of portfolio are you going to create? A whole-school portfolio, capturing the complete story of your curriculum development? Separate portfolios for groups of learners? Or online portfolios for individual learners to demonstrate and record their learning?

- How can you draw on the ways that learners in your school already demonstrate their learning?

Make sure that your portfolio is brief, clear, persuasive and supported by evidence (including learners' work). Remember that it is a record of achievement rather than a formal report.