

# Evaluating and improving our curriculum S1-S3

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## 1. Introduction

This resource sets out to provide a clear and concise 'toolkit' to help secondary schools evaluate their curriculum across the Broad General Education from S1-S3.

It draws together key aspects of the wealth of advice related to Curriculum for Excellence and self-evaluation already available on the Education Scotland website.

Inspections and other engagements with secondary school staff, including [a recent series of conferences to support leadership of the Senior Phase](#), have shown that the aspects below are where many schools have identified the need for further improvement.

- Rationale for your curriculum
- S3 experience
- Aspects of the curriculum that are the 'responsibility of all' staff
- Monitoring and tracking progress
- Universal support
- Transitions

For each of these aspects we have outlined:

- key features of effective provision;
- some questions to help you weigh up strengths and aspects for improvement in your school;
- suggestions for possible sources of evidence

Some case studies are included which illustrate effective practice.

## 2. Rationale for our curriculum

Curriculum for Excellence provides nationally shared aims and goals for education in Scotland.

Schools have the opportunity, within this broad national framework, to apply and develop these aims and goals flexibly to suit their local context and the needs of all their young people.

Everyone in the school needs to be clear about what they are aiming to achieve through the curriculum, which is the totality of a young person's experiences. The rationale is a clear statement of aims, understood and supported by all staff, young people and their parents.

### Key features of effective provision

- The rationale for the curriculum is informed by shared values.
- Everyone has been involved in discussing the rationale for the curriculum and agreement reached.
- All partners across the wider school community understand the rationale which underpins the curriculum.
- All staff are able to talk about the rationale and how it is used to inform decisions about the curriculum.
- Staff have a clear understanding of what they want to achieve for young people.

### Questions for your school

- What are we trying to achieve in our school through our curriculum? Do we have a clear answer?
- Across the school and our wider community, to what extent is there a shared understanding of, and commitment to, our rationale?
- How well do our partners understand the rationale for our curriculum?
- How well has the rationale informed the design of our curriculum?
- To what extent are the programmes and courses across the curriculum in line with our rationale?
- How well does the curriculum experienced by learners allow us to meet the aims we have set out?

### Possible sources of evidence

- Curriculum aims and policies
- Information on programmes and courses
- Focus group discussion with young people and their parents
- Focus group discussion with curriculum leaders and across staff
- Focus group discussion with partners about what learners in your community most need from the curriculum?
- The curriculum as experienced in the classroom
- Sampling of pathways through the curriculum as experienced by individuals and/or groups of learners

### Rationale for our curriculum: case study 1

The school has been using educational research to help staff think about the rationale for the curriculum.

Through focussed reading groups and discussion during staff professional learning time, they have developed a clear understanding of what they want to achieve for children and young people.

The rationale for the curriculum is based on the school's shared vision of working together to inspire learning and shape the future.

The curriculum is designed to provide a broad general education for all young people from S1-S3 and a range of flexible progression routes into the senior phase to meet the needs of all young people.

High priority is given to providing enjoyable and challenging learning in a range of relevant and motivating contexts which develop the skills for the 21st century identified by the school and which provide a unifying focus for a coherent experience across learning.

The promotion of health and wellbeing underpins much of the curriculum to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

### **Rationale for our curriculum: case study 2**

The school has been using a range of self-evaluation tools including Shining the Light of Christ to reflect on the shared faith values of the school community and how this might be better reflected in the rationale for the curriculum.

### **Useful resources on the Education Scotland website**

- How do we develop a rationale? - [Listen to a headteacher talking about how his school built the rationale for the curriculum](#)
- How can we involve the school community in developing a rationale? – [Find out about involving pupils, staff, parents and other partners](#)
- Building the curriculum from the rationale - [Watch as a headteacher explains how to move forward from the rationale to build your curriculum](#)

### 3. S3 experience

Now that schools have presented young people for the new National Qualifications (NQs), they have identified the need to review the broad general education part of the curriculum, particularly the S3 experience.

S3 should provide suitably challenging progression routes to ensure success in the senior phase. It should provide young people with increasing opportunities to specialise in their chosen subjects across different curriculum areas, in line with their entitlement to a broad general education.

Young people's learning in subjects should be deepened, and expectations raised, with learning becoming more challenging across the third and fourth level Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os).

Learning should be aligned with fourth level Es and Os where appropriate in preparation for national qualifications in the senior phase, but should not be overly focused on, or led by, the more formalised assessment structure of NQs.

Young people should be able to make informed decisions about courses they are likely to take forward to National Qualifications.

#### Key features of effective provision

- Young people continue to build well on their prior achievements.
- S3 courses and programmes provide in-depth learning and support higher-order thinking.
- Many young people are specialising and working at fourth curriculum level across their learning. The curriculum also provides courses and programmes at third curriculum level which consolidate learning for those who would benefit from it.
- The curriculum provides appropriate learning opportunities to ensure young people with additional support needs continue to make progress in their targets.
- Interdisciplinary learning is well planned with a clear purpose and provides young people with progression in their learning.
- Breadth in S3 means planning learning using the Es and Os from all curriculum areas (English; mathematics; modern languages; social studies; science; expressive arts; technology; health and wellbeing; RE). This may mean year-long courses as well as short courses. It will mean subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement, all planned using the Es and Os.
- Young people are well informed about their progress. They are taking increasing responsibility for tracking their own progress and profiling their achievements. This supports decisions about which subjects they will choose at the end of S3 to take forward into the senior phase and about qualifications at the appropriate level.
- Learning in S3 is providing appropriate challenge so that all young people are well prepared for moving into the senior phase.
- S3 is NOT about a curriculum dominated by the assessment standards for qualifications and practising for examinations.

#### Questions for your school

- How well does our curriculum in S3 provide breadth whilst also allowing young people to specialise in subjects?
- Do all young people have a curriculum to meet their needs?

- How well does our curriculum meet the needs of all learners, including those who will progress to N3 and those that will progress to Higher in the senior phase?
- How confident are we that the S3 curriculum helps to improve achievement, close the attainment gap and prepare young people well for their futures?
- How do we plan to gather evidence to determine whether the S3 experience is providing young people with the required learning to progress successfully to the senior phase?

### **Possible sources of evidence**

- S3 courses and programmes across the school
- Tracking and monitoring information, including wider achievement programmes
- Focus group discussions with current and previous S3 learners
- Reviewing each young person's curriculum to ensure it provides appropriate challenge and progression

### **S3 experience: case study 1**

Young people at the end of S2 choose a major and minor subject in each curricular area from sciences, social subjects, technologies and expressive arts. Major subjects are for 3 periods per week (ppw), and minor for 1ppw.

All learners continue to study English, mathematics for 4ppw and a modern language for 3ppw. They can also study an additional subject from a choice column for another 3ppw which runs for half of the year.

Within a 33ppw timetable, all young people benefit from 2ppw of physical education and 1ppw of RME. PSHE is provided through conference days throughout each session.

### **S3 experience: case study 2**

Young people at the end of S2 follow a '2 from' model for the curriculum and continue this into S3, where they select two subjects in each curricular area for 2 ppw each. They select two subjects from the sciences, technologies, social subjects and expressive arts curricular areas.

All learners study a modern language for 3ppw and 3.5 ppw of both mathematics and English. All learners can select to study another subject from the choice column for half a year for 2ppw, and this choice includes a number of vocational course options. Learners have 3ppw of PE, 1ppw of RME and 1ppw of PSHE.

### **S3 experience: case study 3**

Young people in S3 continue with their subject choices made at the end of S2 in social subjects, sciences, technologies and expressive arts curricular areas.

All study English, mathematics and a modern language. All young people can choose an additional subject from a choice column from any of the other curricular areas or alternatively a health and wellbeing subject.

They continue with these choices until the end of S3, increasingly working at fourth curriculum level. All young people continue with 2 ppw of physical education and 2ppw of RE(RC).

### **Useful resource on the Education Scotland website**

- [Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 6: Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase part 1](#)

## 4. Aspects of the curriculum that are the ‘responsibility of all’ staff

It is the responsibility of all staff to support young people in developing the skills of literacy and numeracy and an understanding of aspects of health and wellbeing.

### Key features of effective provision

- Staff have a clear and shared strategy for the development and assessment of literacy and numeracy to ensure smooth progression and achievement cross the curriculum.
- The school has a clear overview of progress in literacy and numeracy.
- Across the school, staff have shared high expectations of literacy and numeracy standards.
- Young people are developing strong skills in literacy and numeracy across all curriculum areas. The skills are well referenced by staff to young people, and as a result, young people are aware of where and how they are using these skills, and why they are important.
- Pupils’ work illustrating achieving a level is shared across staff.
- Third level literacy and numeracy work has been quality assured and moderated by teachers from across the school. As a result, there is a shared understanding of expected standards in literacy and numeracy skills, for example the quality of young people’s oral and written work, and their ability to present and interpret mathematical information etc.
- There are no contrived examples of literacy or numeracy in the curriculum.
- Staff are clear about which aspects of health and wellbeing are the responsibility of all, and support young people to evaluate their own progress in these areas.

### Questions for your school

- How well do all staff understand their responsibility to develop young people’s literacy and numeracy skills?
- How well do all staff know the areas of health and wellbeing which are the responsibility of all?
- To what extent do we have an overview of the progress of young people in literacy and numeracy?
- How effective are teachers at developing young people’s confidence and self-esteem?
- How well do we plan with partners, using the Experiences and Outcomes, to ensure that all learners have carefully planned opportunities to develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and to improve their health and wellbeing across a wide range of contexts, including outwith the school?
- How effectively do staff work together across sectors and across curriculum areas, including through moderation activities to:
  - explore together and share what effective learning and teaching in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing looks like;
  - use Experiences and Outcomes to plan the development of literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing;
  - agree standards and expectations; and
  - share judgements of young people’s achievements

### Possible sources of evidence

- Overview of progress in literacy for all young people across the school
- Overview of progress in numeracy for all young people across the school
- Overview of young people’s evaluations of their own health and wellbeing



- Standards improving over time
- Focus group discussions with learners
- Learning observations across the school

### **Useful resources on the Education Scotland website**

- [Responsibility of all](#)
- [Development and progression in literacy and English](#)
- [Numeracy - a skill for learning, life and work](#)
- [Health and Wellbeing responsibility of all making the links](#)

## 5. Monitoring and tracking

Schools need to monitor and track learners' progress so that they can plan appropriate and prompt interventions to support and challenge learners. The information is also used to provide an overview of young people's attainment and progress across the school which informs improvement planning.

### Key features of effective provision

- Staff gather evidence from day-to-day learning and teaching and well-planned assessments. Assessment planning takes into account progress in significant aspects of learning for each curriculum area.
- To ensure the validity, reliability and robustness of teachers' professional judgements, the school has effective approaches to moderation.
- Staff make holistic judgments on a range of assessment evidence that demonstrates how well young people are achieving within a level. This builds staff confidence in developing their understanding of standards for assessment. It also establishes the moderation process across departments as a regular vehicle for wider discussions about improvements in courses and programmes, and in learning and teaching.
- The school has ensured that everyone understands the purpose of the monitoring and tracking system and what it is trying to achieve.
- Young people are regularly involved in conversations about their progress.
- Progress in all aspects/contexts of learning is recorded in the system.
- The system is proportionate and manageable.
- The system records when young people have achieved a level.

### Questions for your school

- How well does our monitoring and tracking system allow senior managers to have clear overview of young people's progress across the school?
- How well do we ensure that the evidence in the monitoring and tracking system is reliable and valid?
- How well does the monitoring and tracking system provide all staff with information which allows them to support and challenge young people?
- How often are young people involved in dialogue about their progress?
- To what extent are we tackling bureaucracy by ensuring that our monitoring and tracking systems only collect information that is used to inform future learning?

### Possible sources of evidence

- Progress of young people across all aspects their learning, including through interdisciplinary work and opportunities for personal achievement
- Assessment evidence from departments/faculties which is used to track progress
- Focus group discussions with all users of the system
- The information within the system over time

### Monitoring and tracking: case study 1 - Linlithgow Academy

The whole-school profile management and pupil tracking system (PROMPTS) is a rigorous but manageable means for teachers to track young people's development progress through the broad general education and the senior phase. It supports the school's clear focus on individual learners.

At subject level, staff have identified the range of assessment evidence required to illustrate how well young people are achieving within a level. This evidence requires young people to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and application of their learning on more than one occasion.

As a result, young people have a deeper understanding of their progress in learning and are able to make informed decisions on their progression pathways as they move through the broad general education.

The progress of young people with additional support needs is carefully and sensitively tracked to ensure barriers to learning are addressed, and that young people are making good progress in their learning.

The PROMPTS system ensures early intervention in terms of those causing concern. As a result, pastoral staff and curriculum leaders are supporting young people to overcome barriers to learning, whether this is related to their family circumstances, health, learning environment or social and emotional factors.

### **Monitoring and tracking: case study 2 - Kyle Academy**

The [parental letter](#) following the inspection of Kyle Academy was published in June 2013 and commended the school's 'very effective approaches to monitoring and tracking young people's progress'.

Tracking and monitoring at Kyle Academy is used very well to support and challenge individual learners, inform target-setting to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people, and provide a strategic overview of young people's attainment and progress in the broad general education for senior staff.

The school uses a range of very effective approaches to track and monitor young people's progress across the broad general education. Staff assess young people's progress and achievement in all curriculum areas.

They gather evidence from day-to-day learning and teaching and well-planned formative and summative assessments. To ensure the reliability and robustness of teachers' professional judgements, the school has had a focus on developing approaches to assessment and moderation.

A number of whole-staff professional learning activities have had a focus on assessment, and cluster development work on moderation has developed a shared understanding and approach to moderation.

Assessment planning takes into account progress in significant aspects of learning for each curriculum area. Staff make holistic judgments on a range of assessment evidence that demonstrates how well young people are achieving within a level.

This has helped build staff confidence in developing their understanding of standards for assessment. It has also established the moderation process across departments as a regular vehicle for wider discussions about improvements in courses and programmes and in learning and teaching.

The school tracks each individual young person's progress and takes action as appropriate. It has effectively adapted South Ayrshire's management information system (MIS) for formally recording progress to make it meaningful for teachers, young people and parents. Staff enter data twice per

session, recording the level within which each young person is working, and giving an indication of his/her progress.

The system currently uses the terms developing, consolidating and secure to record young people's progress. The school recognised that this did not work as effectively for them as they would like and reviewed the approach.

They developed an assessment language defining what these terms mean for the purposes of tracking. This language is ensuring that formal tracking information distinguishes between groups of learners to allow support and challenge to be planned appropriately. It is also helping young people to talk about their progress across a range of learning as well as in terms of specific strengths and next steps.

The school uses standardised testing data to triangulate young people's progress in the broad general education. The school takes appropriate action where there are apparent discrepancies in the assessment data.

All staff have participated in a self-evaluation activity looking at standards across the school. Reflective questions around a range of quantitative data (including standardised test scores and teacher assessment judgements over time) generated discussion which was particularly effective in developing staff understanding of national standards and developing higher expectations of what young people can achieve at the BGE phase.

Tracking information is analysed at whole-school level and used in a proactive way to avoid underachievement and celebrate success. The school addresses concerns through a range of appropriate intervention strategies to ensure young people are making appropriate progress and their needs are being met.

Young people at risk of underachieving are identified at an early stage and support strategies such as mentoring or family clinics are initiated to address this. Teachers can compare the performance of young people in their department to that in other departments across the school.

The school is also using tracking information to analyse performance at whole-school level. This is effectively supporting target-setting and an understanding of what the school's expectations of progress should be to ensure the most effective transitions to the senior phase. The school is using monitoring and tracking well to plan progression for individual learners and for cohorts. For example, they have considered what the S3 curriculum looks like for learners who are not secure at third level by the end of S2 to ensure that they continue to build key learning while specialising within curricular areas.

The senior leadership team analyses the performance of individual departments and identifies trends and patterns. Sharing this at whole school level is supporting self-evaluation at department level. Departments use the data to evaluate how well they are meeting the needs of young people in terms of appropriate challenge and expectations. They also use it to evaluate the impact of courses and programmes in raising standards of attainment.

### **Useful resources on the Education Scotland website**

- [Assessing progress and achievement](#)
- [Professional learning resource: Assessing progress and achievement overarching paper](#)
- [Monitoring and tracking progress and achievement in the broad general education](#)

## 6. Universal support

Central to the entitlement to support is the opportunity for every learner to have regular and frequent discussions with an adult. This adult will know the learner well and be able to guide a review of learning to help identify and plan next steps.

### Key features of effective provision

- All young people have an adult who knows them well and regularly discusses their progress across all aspects of their learning.
- One-to-one discussions about progress, informed by well-considered profiling processes, support young people in understanding their strengths and areas for development.
- Young people are supported in setting relevant and challenging learning targets for themselves.
- Staff plan and take forward interventions successfully to ensure all learners achieve as highly as possible across all aspects of their learning.
- The school's monitoring and tracking system provides information for timely and coherent intervention.
- Staff are helping young people to develop the skills to review and improve their learning and progress.
- Approaches support young people to make informed choices in relation to courses and programmes, for example, choices in relation to "electives", short courses, interdisciplinary learning, achievement opportunities as well as choices at the end of the broad general education for courses leading to qualifications.
- Staff involved in discussing progress with young people have had appropriate professional learning to undertake the role.
- Staff have a manageable number of young people with whom they engage on a frequent and regular basis.
- There are no overly-bureaucratic forms of paperwork and plans which reduce time for direct contact with young people.
- Staff understanding of local employment opportunities and employers' needs is high. Their knowledge of vocational, college and university courses is updated regularly.

### Questions for your school

- How effective are we in ensuring that all learners have regular and frequent discussions with an adult who knows them well in order to review learning and plan next steps?
- To what extent does a key adult or mentor have a holistic overview of each learner's progress?
- How well is the profiling process used to support learners in their understanding of their progress?
- How robust and reliable are our information-sharing systems to ensure the mentor has access to timely and useful information to support learners in discussing their progress?
- How effectively do we involve parents and partner agencies to ensure learners benefit from the right support at the right time?
- How well do parents and young people understand the role of the mentor?
- To what extent have all staff acting as mentors been provided with suitable professional learning opportunities to undertake the role?
- How effective are our links and partnerships with local employers and businesses?

### **Possible sources of evidence**

- Monitoring and tracking evidence being used to plan successful interventions
- Focus group discussions with learners to discuss their experience of the support provided
- Focus groups of staff providing the support
- Observations of support in action
- Questionnaires to young people, staff and local employers

### **Universal support case study**

The school has highly effective systems in place to ensure young people develop as well as they can and receive the pastoral support they require.

There is very effective monitoring and tracking in place to assess the needs of young people across the school, including those who require additional support.

Particularly effective is the responsiveness of form class tutors who intervene and support young people as soon as possible.

Senior managers, pastoral care teachers and learning support staff, together with teachers and young people in the house system, all ensure young people's needs are known, assessed and addressed very effectively.

The school has strong links with partner agencies which help to meet the needs of a range of young people, including those who are looked after, those too ill to attend school and young people with dyslexia.

### **Useful resources on the Education Scotland website**

- [Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 5: Personalised learning](#)
- [Supporting learners' self-reflection resource](#)

## 7. Transitions

One of the original aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence was to secure a joined-up education for children and young people from 3-18. This section aims to support schools in ensuring a seamless progression for learners at points of transition. An effective transition should ensure continuity and progression in learning.

Evidence from school inspections indicates that arrangements to ensure an effective transition from P7 to S1 from the pastoral point of view are generally of high quality, but that curricular transitions are less strong. Key points of transition during the broad general education include the move from P7 to S1 and the move from S3 into the senior phase.

### Some useful features of effective provision

- The school works closely with all partners to plan progressive learning experiences for all young people at times of transition.
- Teachers work together across sectors and departments on moderation and quality assurance of pupils' work. This supports sharing of standards and confidence in teacher judgement.
- Senior managers plan professional learning time for staff which includes opportunities for professional dialogue with colleagues across the school and in other sectors. This enables staff to work together to develop and improve courses and programmes.
- Learners' understanding of their progress, linked to profiling, supports successful transitions.
- Transition from S3 to the senior phase is underpinned by reliable assessment evidence, and this supports informed choices for success in the senior phase, supported by the S3 profile.

### Questions for your school

- How well do we ensure that young people build on their prior learning when they enter S1?
- How much use are we making of the profiling process and the P7 and S3 profiles to support continuity in learning at times of transition?
- How well are we recording, analysing and using evidence of young people's wider achievements at times of transition?
- To what extent do staff use information provided at transition to meet the learning needs of individual pupils?
- How good are the opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to plan and review courses and programmes to ensure they provide continuity and progression?

### Possible sources of evidence

- Questionnaires to pupils and parents
- Focus group discussions with staff, parents, young people, partners
- P7 and S3 profiles
- Information from assessment, monitoring and tracking about young people's progress

### Useful resources on the Education Scotland website

- [Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 6](#)
- [Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 7](#)
- [Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 8](#)

## 8. Other useful documents

- [CfE Briefing papers](#)
- [Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching](#)
- [Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work](#)
- [Building the Curriculum 5: A framework for assessment](#)
- [Building the Curriculum 5: Executive summary](#)
- [Improving our curriculum through self-evaluation](#)
- [Report of Ministerial Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy](#)