THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM – PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

KATE BERRY

This briefing provides an overview of the school curriculum in Scotland and details of the on-going review of the curriculum.

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KEY POINTS

- In general, there is no statutory curriculum in Scotland, although national guidance sets a recommended framework. Delivery of the curriculum is the responsibility of education authorities, governing bodies and individual schools taking into account national guidance.

- The current curriculum is structured into three distinct stages; early years covering the ages 3-5, primary and S1 and S2 under the 5-14 framework and the later stages of secondary from S3 onwards.

- The principles of balance, breadth, continuity and progression underlie the current curriculum.

- National guidance recommends broad curricular areas and time allocations for each area. Schools have been encouraged to make use of the flexibility that exists within the system. Guidelines also contain detailed advice about the content of individual subject areas.

- The broad curricular areas in S1 and S2 remain as key elements in the planning of the S3-S4 and S5-S6 curriculum although individual pupils in these years have a greater freedom of choice in what subjects they study.

- Following the outcome of the national debate on education the Scottish Executive set up a review group in 2003 to review the 3-18 curriculum. A key theme arising from the debate was the need to "de-clutter" the curriculum and introduce greater flexibility within schools.

- The "Curriculum for Excellence" document produced by the review group sets out the aims for education in Scotland and the underlying principles of the curriculum. Work is on-going to translate these principles into practice.

- The intention is to introduce flexibility to the traditional subject-based curriculum by giving schools and teachers more scope to be innovative. Guidance will be streamlined and will focus more on the experiences pupils should have and the outcomes they should achieve. There will also be a greater emphasis on teaching across and beyond traditional curriculum areas.

- It is anticipated the revised framework will be implemented from 2008 onwards.

- These developments in the curriculum have been part of the Executive's wider "Ambitious, Excellent Schools" education agenda and sit within the framework set by the National Priorities in education.

- Key issues surrounding the on-going review include the role of individual subjects in the revised framework, and the level of detailed content within subjects, implementation of the new framework and the link with the assessment and certification system.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

There is almost no statutory curriculum in Scotland. The exceptions are that Gaelic must be taught in Gaelic-speaking areas (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (c44) (s1(5) (a) iii) and religious instruction will normally be expected to be provided (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 s8(i)).

Delivery of the curriculum is the responsibility of education authorities, governing bodies and individual schools under guidance from the Scottish Executive and [Learning Teaching Scotland](#) (LTS)(formed through a merger of the Scottish Curriculum Consultative Council (SCCC) and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology or SCET).

Education authorities or governing bodies are expected to issue clear policy statements to individual schools on the curriculum to be delivered. Within this context, head teachers are responsible for the day to day implementation, management and organisation of the curriculum.

The Executive set up a "National Debate on Eduction" in 2002 to allow those with an interest in education issues to express their views and assist the Executive to develop its long term education policy. Folllowing concerns expressed in the debate about the strucutre and operation of the curriculum the Executive instigated a review of the 3-18 curriculum in 2003. The review group's first document, "A Curriculum for Excellence" (Scottish Executive 2004a) set out the aims of education and principles that should underline the modern curriculum. Further work is on-going to revise and develop more detailed guidance. It is anticpated that full implementation of the revised framework will begin from 2008 onwards.

These developments in the curriculum have been part of the Executive's wider education "Ambitious, Excellent Schools" agenda (Scottish Executive 2004b) which includes other developments such as the establishment of the "schools for ambition" programme, encouraging stronger leadership and reducing class sizes. The developments also link into the work towards the National Priorities that have been developed for education: achievement and attainment, framework for learning, inclusion and equality, values and citizenship, learning for life.

The remainder of this paper considers the current framework, the curriculum review process and potential changes and some issues around the potential changes.

EXISTING CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The current curriculum structure is broadly split into three areas; early years covering ages 3-5, the 5-14 phase which covers primary and S1 and S2 and from S3 onwards. Each of these broad areas has been subject to review and reform at different times over the years. SPICe briefing 04-01 'The School Curriculum' (Berry 2004) provides further information on the historical development of the curriculum.

EARLY EDUCATION

Early education was slow to be established in Scotland with little expansion in the number of nurseries until the 1970s. From the late 1980s there was a growing recognition that a child's early years are a crucial time to begin to influence a number of areas such as attainment levels and children's health.

Now, early education is firmly embedded in government policy. Since 1 April 2002 local authorities have had the duty to secure free, part-time pre-school education for all 3 and 4 year

olds whose parents wish it. There is also now a requirement for an early education and childcare plan in every local authority area. Childcare partnerships between local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors have also been established.

The aims of pre-school education, as set out in the 1994 report *Education of Children under 5 in Scotland* (Scottish Executive 1994) and subsequently in the "Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5" (SCCC 1999a) are:

- to provide a safe and stimulating environment in which children can feel happy and secure
- to encourage the emotional, social, physical, creative and intellectual development of children
- to promote the welfare of children
- to encourage positive attitudes to self and others and develop confidence and self-esteem
- to create opportunities for play
- to encourage children to explore the world
- to provide opportunities to stimulate interest and imagination
- to extend children's abilities to communicate ideas and feelings in a variety of ways

In general the curriculum review group found that the existing guidance in this area was working relatively well but could do with minor updating. In addition there could be better continuity between early years and primary, especially in learning and teaching approaches.

5-14 CURRICULUM

The 5-14 curriculum takes children through primary school and the S1 and S2 years. 'Curriculum Design for the Secondary Stages' (SCCC 1999b), which has been revised a number of times since 1987 and "5-14 Guidelines" produced by LTS are key guidance in this area. All the guidelines can be accessed at: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/guidelines/.

The overall aim is to promote the teaching of the curriculum that adheres to the five underlying principles of: breadth; balance; coherence; continuity and progression. The 5-14 curriculum is divided into five broad curricular areas. The guidance also recommends the minimum time that should be spent on each of these as follows:

Minimum time allocations in primary schools

- language (including modern language from no later than P6): 20%
- mathematics: 15%
- environmental studies society, science and technology :15%
- expressive arts (drama, music art and physical education):15%
- religious and moral education with personal and social education and health education 15%

Minimum time allocations in S1-S2 over two years:

- language: 20%
- mathematics:10%
- environmental studies, science and technology: 30%

- expressive arts and physical education:15%
- religious and moral education: 5%

Some aspects, such as information and communication technology, are developed in all areas of the curriculum. A flexibility factor of 20% remains for schools to incorporate activities that reflect their own needs and priorities. Schools have been encouraged by the Executive, through the issuing of a circular (Scottish Executive 2003), to make the best use of the remaining 20% flexibility they have available to them.

While the guidelines are not compulsory "they have been adopted in most schools and have tended to become the norm, encouraged by inspections and local authority policy" (Priestly 2005).

Details of how this structure is likely to change are considered in considered in the review section below.

S3 +

S3 and S4 cover the ages 14-16. Generally after the first two years of secondary school pupils begin courses within the National Qualifications (NQs) framework.

The NQ framework covers Standard Grades and National Units/Courses. There are three levels of study at Standard Grade (Credit, General and Foundation). Pupils usually take exams at two levels – Credit and General or General and Foundation. National Units/Courses are available at seven levels – Access 1, 2 and 3, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher. Further information is contained in 'Scotland's National Qualifications: A Quick Guide' (Scottish Qualifications Framework 2006). The Executive has also provided guidance on the appropriate age and stage when young people can be presented for externally assessed qualifications (Scottish Executive 2005a).

While pupils can leave school after S4 the majority chose to stay on, at least until S5.

The principles of breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression within the curriculum remain for the S3 and S4 years although a greater degree of choice is allowed. There are eight curriculum areas in S3 and S4 that link in with the five curriculum areas in S1 and S2. The guidance (SCCC 1999) recommends a minimum time allocation for each of the eight areas as outlined below, which represents approximately 70% of the total time available to pupils. Again schools have been encouraged to use the remaining 30% flexibly.

- Languages and communication: 360 hours
- Mathematical studies and applications: 200 hours
- Scientific studies and applications: 160 hours
- Social and environmental studies: 160 hours
- Technological activities and applications: 80 hours
- Creative and aesthetic activities: 80 hours
- Physical education: 80 hours
- Religious and moral education: 80 hours

While it is recommended that pupils should include systematic study within each of the above areas the match between NQs and the areas is not exact and many courses contribute to more than one area. The guidance also stresses the need to make connections across all aspects of

the curriculum. Furthermore, schools are required to incorporate core skills and aspects of personal and social development throughout the curriculum at all stages.

The Scottish Executive guidance on flexibility referred to above applies to S3 as well as the 5-14 curriculum.

S5 AND S6 CURRICULUM

The SCCC guidance notes that as pupils choose to return to S5/S6 on a voluntary basis, this stage of schooling should be characterised by negotiated programmes of study. Nevertheless, the school should ensure that the principles of breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression are sustained.

THE 3-18 CURRICULUM REVIEW

In 2002 the Executive instigated a "National Debate on Education". The responses to the debate highlighted some areas for improvement in relation to the curriculum. In particular response suggested the need to:

- reduce overcrowding in the curriculum

- make learning more enjoyable

- make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18

- achieve a better balance between "academic" and "vocational" subjects

- broaden the range of learning experiences for young people

- equip young people with core skills

- make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning

- offer more choices to meet the needs of individual young people

In response to the National Debate, Ministers established a curriculum review group in November 2003. Its task was to identify the purposes of education for the 3 to 18 age range as a whole and determine the key principles to be applied in redesigning the curriculum. The Table below summaries the key developments to date and planned work. Further details about these developments are given below the table.

Date	Development
November 2003	Curriculum Review Group is established
2004	*A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive 2004) is published by the review group. It sets out proposed aims for education and principles of the curriculum *A Curriculum for Excellence: Ministerial Response* (Scottish Executive 2004c) is published. Ministers establish a Programme Board to advise ministers and to work towards putting the principles into practice.

2005	Groups were established across eight curriculum areas to review existing guidance and provide intial advice on updating simplifying.
	Skills for Work courses in schools and colleges start to be piloted.
March 2006	*Progress and Proposals* is published by the Programme Board (Scottish Executive 2006). It made more detailed proposals and set out areas for further consideration. The document also aimed to engage teachers in professional reflection.
November 2006 (and ongoing)	Building the Curriculum materials begin to be published on the Curriculumn for Excellence website
	The main aim of this material is to allow staff to start preparing for working with revised guidance.
December 2006	The Scottish Executive invited teachers to take part in the Teachers for Excellence debate over an 8 week period. Further details are available on the Curriculum for Execellence website at:
	http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/teachersforexcellence/index.asp
March 2007	Building the Curriculum 2 – Active Learning in the Early Years material published
	Planet Earth outcomes published on the Curriculum for Excellence website - these give an outline of what part of the revised science curriculum might look like.
On going	A process of proffessional engagment and development. This includes conferences, the development of education authority contacts and gathering of good practice initiatives.
On going	Work on the curriculum guidance curriculum areas, curriculum architecutre, assessment and qualifications.
June 2007 (anticipated)	Publish guidance on the curriculum
August 2007 (anticipated)	Year of familiarisation, preparation and development
August 2008 (anticipated)	Implementation begins

A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

The curriculm review group's first publication "A Curriculum for Excellence" (Scottish Executive 2004a) provides statements about the aims of education in Scotland. These reflect many of the concepts which have been in existence previously but sets them out more explicity. In summary, the purposes of education are to enable all young people to become:

- successful learners

- confident individuals

- responsible citizens

- effective contributors

*"*A Curriculum for Excellence" also established clear principles for curriculum design, namely;

- challenges and enjoyment

- breadth, progression, depth

- personalisation and choice

- coherence and relevance

These principles reflect the existing principles of breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression- the concepts of challenges and enjoyment, depth, personalisation and choice and relevance are new.

The Ministerial response to 'A Curriculum for Excellence' (Scottish 2004c) accepted the group's report and set out plans for taking the work forward. In the first instance the 3-15 age group was targeted with an emphasis on de-cluttering the curriculum and giving teachers greater flexibility to teach in innovative and creative ways.

A Programme Board was established in 2004 to advise Ministers and to steer this programme. The Scottish Executive Education Department, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Authority and HM Inspectorate of Education are all involved in the programme.

"Progress and Proposals," was published in March 2006 by the Curriculum Review Programme Board (Scottish Executive 2006). It made more detailed proposals and set out areas for further consideration. The document also aimed to engage teachers in professional reflection. A key theme was that the curriculum needs to be viewed in a different way- as a single framework that promotes learning across a wide range of contexts and experiences.

In trying to understand how all the work to date will translate into different practices the following table may be helpful. Please note that this is summary based on the current information. As work progresses further details will become available.

Current	Proposed
Framework	
Distinct stages 3-5, 5-14, S3+ supported by detailed guidance	Single framework 3-18 supported by streamlined and simplified guidance
Early Years	
Provided in the "Curriculum Framework for 3-5"	Existing guidance is thought to be working well although some minor updating is required. There will be better continuity between early years education and early primary.

Primary and Secondary	
Primary, S1 and S2 covered by detailed 5-14 guidelines.	Schools will be given greater scope in designing their own curriculum which should provide opportunities for broader achievements, interdisciplinary activities and personal choices
	Guidelines on curriculum areas will set out both experiences and outcomes expected to be obtained from the area of study
	More emphasis on active learning – particularly in the early primary stages.
	Greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy with all teachers having responsibility for promoting language and literacy development.
	Pupils will have more opportunities to exercise choices earlier than currently
Broad curricular areas	Broad curricular areas will remain but there will be greater emphasis on interdisciplinary learning.
	Introduction of optional Skills for Work vocational courses for pupils of all abilities in S3 and above to help them develop knowledge and skills for employment and life (see below for further detail)
Attainment through the 5 to 14 curriculum, is assessed at five or six levels: A (lowest) to E or F (highest). Teachers regularly assess their pupils' performance to see how they are progressing through the levels.	There will be a new means of recording achivement. The proposed framework is based on 6 levels from early in pre-school and primary 1 to senior in S4-S6 (may be earlier for some). Within each level pupils will be expected to have experienced a range of activities and achieved a number of outcomes.
	These levels do not imply testing at specific stages. Teacers will make use of a range of broad judgements.
The NQ framework provides the basis for certification in the latter stages of secondary	There is work on going at the moment to review certain aspects of the NQ framework – see below.

SKILLS FOR WORK COURSES

In the ministerial response to "A Curriculum for Excellence", the Scottish Executive made a commitment to deliver new skills for work courses to "extend choice and increase young people's motivation and enthusiasm for learning" (Scottish Executive 2004c). There are a number of possible models of delivery of Skills for Work courses. However, all approaches are likely to involve some form of close partnership arrangements, whether school-college, school-employer, or school-private training provider.

Examples of skills gained through the courses are time-keeping, customer care, self evaluation, positive attitudes to learning, flexible approaches to solving problems and confidence to set goals and learn from experience.

The courses were introduced in August 2005 on a two-year pilot basis. Five Skills for Work courses, in four subject areas, were piloted for the first time in 2005-06:

- Construction Crafts - Intermediate 1

- Early Education and Childcare - Intermediate 1 and 2

- Financial Services - Intermediate 2

- Sport and Recreation - Intermediate 1

The additional courses in 2006-07 are:

- Construction Crafts - Intermediate 2

- Sport and Recreation - Intermediate 2

- Rural Skills - Intermediate 1

- Hairdressing - Intermediate 1

- Practical experiences: Construction and Engineering - Access 3

The pilot is being evaluated from September 2005 to October 2007. It is intended that the programme will be available for all schools from Autumn 2007/08, including an additional three courses in the areas of Engineering Skills (Intermediate 1), Hospitality (Intermediate 1) and the first course at Higher level in Health and Social Care.

ISSUES

ROLE OF SUBJECTS

There have been some concerns expressed about what role individual subjects will play in the revised curriculum structure. This issue gained media attention, particularly in relation to history, in late 2005 (e.g. Scotland on Sunday 2006). The then Education Minister, Peter Peacock MSP, had made remarks at a conference which some interpreted as implying the end of history as a discrete subject in schools. Although the Minister stressed that his comments were taken out of context it prompted history teachers to lobby MSPs on the matter.

Concerns about the role of individual subjects in the curriculum were raised in a parliamentary debate in March 2006. During the debate the Minister stressed that:

> " ..subjects will inevitably always be part of how we structure learning…I fully expect that, in future, we will have the current range of subjects in schools, although the contribution that subjects make to schools' purposes needs to adapt with the changing times and challenges." (Scottish Parliament 2006).

While the review's intention of increasing the interdisciplinary activities of subjects has been welcomed by some professionals, some concern still seems to remain. In March 2007 the registrar of the General Teaching Council for Scotland was reported in the Herald as recognising the need for greater interdisciplinary learning. However, he expressed fears that an "unintended consequence" could be "the undermining of the very subjects which are at the heart of the school system, particularly in secondary schools" (Herald 2007).

Therefore, it seems as though the need to achieve an appropriate balance between individual subjects and interdisciplinary approaches in the revised guidance and practice will be a challenge for the Programme Board and for professionals in practice.

Related to this is the issue of the level of content of the guidance on individual curricular areas. Learning and Teaching Scotland are revising existing guidance to focus more on the outcomes and experiences that will be expected.

As the first stage in this process, some materials from the science area of the curriculum are being used as illustrations of what these experiences and outcomes look like and how they will be applied. These can be viewed at:
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/outcomes/importantpoints/importantpoints.asp

The move to an approach based on experiences and outcomes is supposed to give teachers greater flexibility in how they approach learning and encourage greater cross curricular activities. However, there has been debate about how much detailed content the revised guidance should contain, the extent to which this broad approach can be easily applied in practice and whether this will mean a loss of in-depth learning of particular subjects (TES Friday 16 March 2007). What is clear is that it will require subject teachers to approach their subjects in a different way. This raises issues about implementation of the revised curriculum in practice.

IMPLEMENTATION

Much of the change in the curriculum will centre on how teaching is carried out and this will be a long term process. For all teachers there will be a greater emphasis on employing a broader range of approaches, adapting to different learning styles and working more with other colleagues. In addition, teachers across all subjects will be expected to have a responsibility to develop pupils' core skills. Specifically, in the early primary years there will be a greater emphasis on active learning through play.

While some teachers will already be familiar with these approaches, for others it will represent more of a cultural change. The curriculum review is being accompanied by a process of professional engagement and professional development, but it is likely that this will be still be required over a much longer time period to effect genuine change. The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) has stressed the need for teachers to be given adequate time within their working week to meet and discuss the issues arising from the review and for education authorities to enable the teachers they employ to undertake the required professional development (EIS 2006).

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

The new approach to the curriculum will have an impact on existing assessment and certification structures.

While work is still on going to develop the proposed assessment framework as outlined in the above table, Ministers have said that they are keen to ensure that the scope and nature of assessment and qualifications are consistent with the aims, values and puroses of the 'Curriculum for Excellence'. Future developments should build upon the principles of the national assessment system outlined in the Executive's circular 'Assessment and Reporting 3-14' (Scottish Executive 2005b) and being delivered through the the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme whose main message is that assesment should be seen as an integral part of the learning process.

AifL aims to develop a streamlined and coherent system of assessment to ensure that parents, teachers, pupils and other professionals have the feedback they need about pupils' learning and development needs. A commitment was made by the Executive to introduce AifL into all Scottish schools by 2007.

Ministers have said that they intend to retain Access, Higher and Advanced Higher although they will have to adapt over time to reflect the *Curriculum for Excellence.* This will be built into the normal procedures for updating and refreshing National Qualifications. Current work by the Executive and its partner organisations is focusing on addressing the use of Standard Grade and Intermediate qualifications in providing a unified structure that reflects the 'Curriculum for Excellence' and builds upon the best of the current arrangements. It is expected that proposals for formal consultation will be made later this year.

Ministers have also said that they wish to secure better recognition of pupils' wider achievements beyond National Qualifications. But they aim to do this without creating additional formal assessment and workload pressures. Again it is expected that proposals for formal consultation on this issue will be made later this year.

The new Skills for Work courses are recognised in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework as full qualifications at the level studied. Candidates need to complete and pass all the units to achieve the course award, and the Unit assessments are externally moderated by the SQA. The courses have been developed in consultation with representatives from across the educational spectrum and with employers to ensure they have credability with all potential users. One of the main issues arising from the National Debate was the need to ensure "parity of esteem" between academic and vocational qualifications and this is likely to be an on going issue when rolling out the courses on a wider basis.

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