

curriculum for excellence
building the curriculum 1 – the
contribution of curriculum areas
a guide to developing professional
practice

- > SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS
- > CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS
- > RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS
- > EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS



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The Scottish Government and its partner organisations would like to thank David Cameron and Keir Bloomer for producing this guide.

Throughout this paper, the term 'school' is taken to include pre-school centres, residential and day special schools (including secure provision) and primary and secondary schools. The term 'teacher' in this document is used to refer to all teaching staff including pre-school practitioners, college lecturers, Community Learning and Development (CLD) staff and other relevant practitioners.

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ISBN: 978-0-7559-9630-8

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for the Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland
DPPAS10692 (09/10)

Published by the Scottish Government, September 2010

Further copies are available from
BookSource
50 Cambuslang Road
Cambuslang Investment Park
Glasgow G32 8NB

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What is Building the Curriculum 1 about?

Building the Curriculum 1 is concerned with the overall structure of the curriculum, particularly during the phase of general education that extends up to the end of S3 and encompasses learning at the third and, where appropriate, the fourth Level. It focuses on the contribution of curriculum areas or subjects including their contribution to interdisciplinary learning and their ability to illustrate wider themes.

What is it for?

The paper is aimed mainly at professional development. It is a vehicle for reflection, helping teachers to think about the curriculum in new ways. Specifically, it can be used to help:

- > identify ways of developing learning and teaching to reflect the four capacities
- > make connections across the curriculum through collaborative planning
- > plan interdisciplinary work
- > engage with the experiences and outcomes.

It emphasises the central role of the teacher and promotes the view that professional development is crucial to the success of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

What is new about it?

Building the Curriculum 1 focuses on 4 main ideas. These are developed in the following sub-sections.



1 Developing the 4 capacities

The purpose of the curriculum is to ensure that all young people become Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. This applies at all stages from pre-school through to end of secondary schooling and into lifelong learning. It is, therefore, vital that teachers should ensure that the content of courses, the learning approaches employed and the support given to learners reflect these aims.

2 Overall structure of the curriculum

The curriculum is more than the sum of the courses offered in formal classroom settings. *Curriculum for Excellence* envisages learning taking place in four contexts. Two of these – curriculum areas and subjects, and interdisciplinary studies – relate to the provision of courses of study in school. However, the school is also pupils' place of work and usually plays an important part in their social lives. Their experience of the school community and the contribution they make to it thus form an important part of their learning. The final context lies in the outside world and the opportunities it offers for wider achievement.

Building the Curriculum 1 focuses on the first two contexts; in other words, on what has been seen traditionally as the formal curriculum. It sees this as consisting of complementary elements; curriculum areas and interdisciplinary learning.

Curriculum areas provide a way of ensuring breadth in the curriculum and of grouping experiences and outcomes under recognisable titles. They are not intended to be rigid structures. Thus it is possible to organise experiences and outcomes in different ways. An emphasis might be placed on making connections across the curriculum by planning to cover a range of experiences and outcomes through interdisciplinary studies. *Building the Curriculum 1* promotes breadth through a curriculum that mixes subject

teaching and interdisciplinary work while also giving emphasis to the major themes that are the responsibility of all teachers. Such an approach is already well-established in the primary school but would represent a significant innovation in most secondary schools.

Curriculum for Excellence sees three major themes as having such significance as to require the contribution of all teaching staff. Health and wellbeing is seen as promoting confidence, emotional wellbeing, independent thinking and positive attitudes and dispositions. Literacy and numeracy are of fundamental personal, social and economic importance. Their contribution to further learning in any area is indispensable. All teachers are, therefore, expected to contribute to developing the associated skills. Specific responsibilities are set out in the three sets of experiences and outcomes designated as being for all practitioners.

Other themes such as enterprise, citizenship, sustainable development international education and creativity are also important. Experiences and outcomes relevant to these themes can be found in various curriculum areas. Schools (and their partner organisations) need to plan collaboratively in order to ensure that these are used as effectively as possible to ensure that the themes emerge as valuable contexts for learning.

Young people need to understand something of the different ways of knowing about the world that are embedded in the different curriculum areas. But they also need to appreciate that all knowledge is connected. Interdisciplinary learning is thus an essential element in the education of every young person at every stage. Indeed, synthesis – the capacity to draw together ideas and skills from different areas of expertise – is one of the most important higher order capabilities of the 21st century.

Good interdisciplinary learning is more than the sum of its parts. The experiences and outcomes are the building blocks which enable the assembling of coherent and connected knowledge, skills and understanding



from disparate curriculum areas. The separate elements of learning have to complement each other and contribute to a deeper understanding. Interdisciplinary learning can be directed by a single teacher using material from different subject areas or may require a team contributing separate areas of expertise but it must be planned so that the experience is a coherent whole, contributing depth to the overall curriculum.

Interdisciplinary learning may take place in any context and be of any duration. It may, for example, take the form of short one-off projects or extended courses of study. It can also offer a context for creative and innovative patterns of organisation such as mixed stage learning. However, it must be seen as an essential element in the overall curriculum, enjoying equal status with and complementing learning in curriculum areas. Learners should understand that it is a significant part of their total learning experience and appreciate its relevance to their skills development.

In summary, interdisciplinary learning should be:

- > carefully planned around clear purposes
- > based on experiences and outcomes drawn from different curriculum areas
- > directed towards depth of learning and understanding
- > effective in developing skills including higher order skills such as synthesis.

3 Using the Experiences and Outcomes

Building the Curriculum 1 identifies the set of experiences and outcomes as the chief mechanism for taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. Its advice has been supplemented by later guidance. The following paragraphs attempt to summarise the position to date.

Taken together the experiences and outcomes sum up national aspirations for every young person. They are specified for all curriculum areas up to the end of the fourth Level. All learners have an entitlement to a broad general education that extends to the end of S3 and is secured by ensuring the inclusion of all of the experiences and outcomes in all curriculum areas up to and including the third Level. It is particularly important to reinforce that the broad general education does not represent a three year common course in secondary schools. Most learners will progress into the fourth Level in many aspects of their learning before the end of S3. This offers the opportunity for study in greater depth and helps to lay foundations for more specialised learning in the senior phase.

The experiences and outcomes represent an innovative way of specifying the curriculum in two important respects. Firstly, they do not prescribe in detail the content to be followed but are intended to empower teachers to innovate while still ensuring that young people receive their entitlement. Secondly they are clearly focused as much on what the young person should be able to do as on what he/she should know. This is not to imply that knowledge is viewed as being of reduced importance but rather that inert information is of little value. Young people must acquire deep understanding and the capacity to apply their knowledge in any relevant context.

4 Distinctive contributions of curriculum areas

Building the Curriculum 1 outlines the distinctive contribution that each curriculum area makes to the overall design of the curriculum. These are summarised at the end of this paper. Teachers should ensure that each of the features of this contribution is present in the courses for which they are responsible.

Up to the end of the third Level, all courses should serve a number of common purposes. They should contribute to the general education of all learners. At the same time, they should also provide a firm foundation for those who later choose to pursue courses of study in the particular curriculum area at an advanced level and/or take up careers in related areas. All courses should help in the development of general skills such as comprehension and analysis as well as skills specifically related to the subject area. They should foster imagination, creativity and the enterprising attitudes essential for success in the modern world. Learners should be equipped to apply their learning in new contexts and innovative ways.

In conclusion

Curriculum for Excellence requires schools to plan the curriculum as a coherent whole. This is obviously best done on a collaborative basis. Schools will wish to ensure that:

- > the curriculum gives opportunities for learning within curriculum areas and through interdisciplinary learning
- > each curriculum area makes its full contribution to the overall experience
- > all learning contributes to the development of the four capacities
- > experiences and outcomes are appropriately and imaginatively used in the development of all courses
- > interdisciplinary learning develops depth of understanding and is given status.

The contribution of specific curriculum areas to developing the four capacities

Expressive Arts

Courses should:

- > provide enjoyment and inspiration
- > give opportunities to work collaboratively with others
- > enable young people to learn from practical experience
- > develop an appreciation of cultural values
- > help learners understand the contribution of the arts to individuals, communities and the economy
- > give opportunities for learners to perform and present their work.

Health and Wellbeing

The school should ensure that all learners:

- > have a positive experience of healthy living activities
- > learn to cope with challenging situations
- > acquire the capacity to sustain physical, emotional and social wellbeing
- > think critically about how to make informed health choices and contribute to their own and others' wellbeing
- > promote self-management skills and personal identity



Languages

Courses should:

- > encourage intellectual curiosity
- > develop skills of thinking, learning, communicating and working with others
- > develop critical thinking and discernment
- > exercise creativity
- > exploit a wide range of different texts and media
- > help learners make connections
- > promote understanding of how language works
- > increase the learner's understanding of his/her own and other cultures
- > develop competence in other languages

Mathematics

Courses should:

- > promote essential numeracy skills
- > develop an understanding of the concepts, principles and processes of mathematics
- > embody problem solving as an intrinsic element of mathematical approaches
- > equip learners to apply mathematical competence in relevant contexts
- > promote an understanding of the impact of mathematics on all aspects of life

Religious and Moral Education

Courses should:

- > explore morals and values
- > help learners develop their own beliefs, values and a responsible attitude to others
- > explore different beliefs and approaches to living
- > develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other religions
- > allow learners to recognise religion as a response to questions about the nature and meaning of life
- > develop skills of reflection, critical thinking and deciding how to act when making moral decisions

Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools

In addition to the above objectives courses in denominational schools should:

- > develop their knowledge and deepen their understanding of the catholic faith
- > investigate and understand the relevance of the catholic faith to questions about truth and the meaning of life

N.B. Within Roman Catholic schools children and young people will be at different places in the spectrum of faith development. The Scottish Catholic Education Service is responsible for the faith content of the curriculum in Scottish schools on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland.



Science

Courses should:

- > stimulate curiosity and questioning
- > systematically investigate the environment
- > provide experience of practical investigations and experiments
- > promote understanding of empirical methods and appreciate that knowledge is provisional
- > interpret evidence to create meaning
- > convey an understanding of the big ideas and concepts of science
- > develop an understanding of the impact of science on society, culture and the environment
- > use scientific understanding in considering social, ethical, economic and environmental issues

Social Studies

Courses should:

- > develop an understanding of the world and the forces that have shaped learners' own and other societies
- > help learners make sense of changes in society
- > develop learners' enquiry skills and capacity for critical thinking
- > promote understanding of how human activity and achievements influence the social and physical environment and shape values
- > provide a context in which learners can exercise informed and responsible citizenship

Technologies

Courses should:

- > help learners to apply knowledge and skill to design and create products
- > develop learners' imagination and creativity
- > foster the enterprising attitudes essential for success in the global economy
- > offer opportunities for work-related learning
- > encourage learners to be skilled users of current technologies and to embrace future developments
- > promote understanding of the impact of technology on society

(With thanks to the North Lanarkshire Council Quality Improvement Service)



<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/policycontext/btc/index.asp>



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ISBN: 978-0-7559-9630-8

This document is also available on the Scottish Government website:
www.scotland.gov.uk

APS Group Scotland
DPPAS10692 (09/10)

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