

The curriculum: progress and opportunities

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Foreword

Our young people are one of our most precious resources. As with all precious resources, we need to nurture and nourish them, and provide the foundations on which they can go on to build successful lives. A curriculum and assessment system that motivates and engages young people and helps them become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible adults will do just that. Teachers, parents, education and employment communities, the media and the public should all see the curriculum as something to embrace, support and celebrate. Most of all, young people should relish the opportunity for discovery and achievement that the curriculum affords them.

It is QCA's responsibility to develop a modern, world-class curriculum and assessment system that inspires and challenges all learners and prepares them for the future. But we don't do it on our own. *The curriculum: progress and opportunities* looks at what we have achieved so far with the support of the education community to begin to make this vision a reality, and looks forward to some of the challenges and

opportunities that we face together.

This year has been one of continued curriculum conversation and achievement. We have talked with, listened to and worked with thousands of people. These conversations continue to strengthen our belief that our direction of travel is right. Supported by the results of our evidence-gathering programme and our work with government, employers, education leaders and school communities, we continue to use the *big picture of the curriculum* to inform our work.

This year we were given a remit to work closely with Sir Jim Rose on his independent review of the primary curriculum. This work has proceeded at pace. We have engaged with learners, their parents, carers and guardians, headteachers, teachers and others in thinking about how the primary curriculum can better meet the needs of all our learners. We have also continued to update the new curriculum website, bringing together subject disciplines with the overall aims for learning. We have worked more closely than ever before with strategic partners to ensure the messages to schools

about introducing the new secondary curriculum are clear and consistent. We have strengthened our work with schools as the co-development network evolved into the Curriculum Network. Finally, we continued our conversation about encouraging new assessment approaches to ensure a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The curriculum: progress and opportunities summarises all this work and continues to set a challenging agenda. Please support us in making our aim a reality so that we really make learning irresistible for all our young people.



Mick Waters
Director, Curriculum
Qualifications and Curriculum
Authority

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Introduction

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) aims to develop a modern, world-class curriculum and assessment system that will inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future.

At the beginning of 2006 we published *The curriculum: QCA looks forward*, in which we set out our main priorities for the four year period from 2006 to 2009. In 2007 we published the follow-up *The curriculum: taking stock of progress* and last year we published *The curriculum: building on success*. These three documents described how we planned to meet objectives across all aspects of our work and listed

the milestones to be achieved along the way.

The curriculum: progress and opportunities is the fourth booklet in this series and sums up what we aimed to do in 2008, what successes we had, and what we aim to achieve in 2009 and beyond.

QCA set a challenging curriculum and assessment agenda for 2008 that included:

- continuing to work on the 11–19 reform plan, including launching the first five Diplomas, introducing new GCSEs and A levels and the extended project

- developing the new *Secondary curriculum* website to become the *National curriculum* website, which now also incorporates the existing primary curriculum and provides support for curriculum planners and teachers
- supporting the independent review of the primary curriculum by collecting evidence, developing a revised curriculum framework and managing all related consultations
- continuing to trial new ways of assessing pupils' progress in the curriculum by developing aspects of the Making Good Progress pilot
- working with schools, young people, their parents, carers and guardians and wider curriculum stakeholders to continue to build our evidence base for a modern, world-class curriculum
- continuing our national conversation to promote a better understanding of the curriculum
- extending the network of curriculum co-development partners.

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A curriculum that meets the needs of all learners must be equally inspiring and challenging for all young people. It must also take into account the wide-ranging requirements and interests of all cultural groups. Our curriculum equality plan explains how we will meet the challenge of placing disability, gender and race equality issues at the heart of our planning, implementation and review process.

Another key aspect of QCA's work is the importance of evidence developed through strong,

effective partnerships and engagement with all education stakeholders. You will see extracts from many of our consultations and questionnaires throughout this document.

QCA is committed to working in partnership to develop a curriculum that prepares young people to be responsible citizens of the 21st century. In 2009 we will be working even more closely with all of our stakeholders, including young people and parents, carers and guardians, to ensure that this happens. Your views are very

important to us – if you have thoughts on how we can improve our work in 2009 please email us at evidence@qca.org.uk or complete our online questionnaire at www.qca.org.uk/qca_15553.aspx We look forward to hearing from you.

The new secondary curriculum

QCA aim: To provide a curriculum with depth, coherence, breadth and flexibility.

QCA challenges: To support schools in introducing the new secondary curriculum as they develop and personalise it to meet the needs of their own learners.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the new secondary curriculum in helping to develop successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- help schools to introduce the new secondary curriculum through developing the web portal and hard copy material with further models, school case studies, planning tools and guidance
- develop appropriate tools and materials to help schools evaluate the impact of the new secondary curriculum
- work closely with schools and system leaders to develop common messages and shared understanding to support the new secondary curriculum.

What we did in 2008

We worked with a range of strategic partners to introduce the new secondary curriculum and new qualifications to help us achieve the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

We worked with partners to review and develop the cross curriculum dimension on identity and cultural diversity to promote community cohesion in the curriculum. We also launched a science,

technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) area of our website to promote STEM opportunities. We developed coherent approaches and messages with all key partners who work with schools, including the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the National Strategies (NS), the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the CfBT Education Trust and the Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (ASPECT). From this work we developed five key messages for schools – that there should be:

- a greater coherence of the whole of 11–19 education for learners
- systematic planning for the whole curriculum to include subjects, personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), functional skills and cross-curriculum dimensions
- plans to increase learners' engagement, motivation and commitment to their learning
- conversations about assessment by use of the evolving Assessing Pupils' Progress framework and the Making Good Progress pilot

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- a focus on 'disciplined curriculum innovation' including measuring its impact.

These messages, along with further guidance, have been published in *Designing and implementing a coherent 11–19 curriculum*.

These messages were also shared with all local authorities at a national conference in September (in association with CfBT, ASPECT and our other implementation partners) enabling all authorities to create strategies to work more closely with their schools in introducing the new curriculum.

As a result, many schools and colleges are taking advantage of the flexibility to innovate and are

making changes to their curriculum design and assessment. Schools still need significant support to manage the changes required to make a real difference to the learner and so, working with our implementation partners, we developed a series of publications that are now available:

- *Personal, learning and thinking skills*
Guidance on how the skills can be developed and how each subject contributes to them
- *Cross-curriculum dimensions*
A leaflet signposting how schools can develop cross-curriculum dimensions

- *Compelling learning experiences*
A guide to support schools in designing compelling learning experiences based on the three curriculum questions
- *Making a difference to learners*
A tried and tested seven-step process to help schools transform their curriculum and make a difference to learners' lives, achievements and prospects
- *Increasing commitment to learning*
A practical tool to help teachers design and implement their curriculum.

The *National curriculum* website

Following the successful launch of the new *Secondary curriculum* website in August 2007, we've received a very positive reaction by users. Eighty one per cent of visitors said that they would recommend the site to a colleague or a friend and, in June alone, homepage hits were running at nearly 425,000. The key audience of senior practising educators, heads of department and subject leaders believe that getting to key curriculum information is straightforward. Frequently used descriptions include 'informative', 'accessible' and 'easy to understand'. Since the launch, QCA has updated the website with new and

enhanced content and tools to further support schools. Users can now create a portfolio of useful materials for future reference and can compare aspects of different programmes of study. New information has been added about the support available from our implementation partners, along with links to their support sites. Subject landing pages have also been redesigned and now include the new programmes of study and attainment targets alongside the old programmes of study. Case studies of incorporating functional skills have also been added. The biggest change, however, is the expansion from the *Secondary*

curriculum website to the *National curriculum* website, as the site now also includes the existing primary curriculum. This includes material migrated from the *National curriculum in action* and the *National curriculum online* websites. Visit the new *National curriculum* website at www.qca.org.uk/curriculum

Our aims for 2009

In 2009 we aim to:

- further support schools with the changes needed to make a real difference to learners during their secondary years
- strengthen our focus on the whole of the 11–19 curriculum, rather than just key stage 3
- begin to measure the impact of the new curriculum and create a clear picture of its effects
- hold a national event to unite all those with an interest in the cross-curriculum dimensions to look at how we can make them an integral part of learning.

'At school we learn about things that interest me and I can really see the point of lessons. I make choices about what and how I learn and, as a result, feel the curriculum I'm following is my own.'

Year 9 learner

Cross-curriculum dimensions

In 2007 we published and circulated guidance for schools about the global dimension. We have been involved in workshops all over the country, introducing teachers to the activities outlined in the booklet to support the development of a global dimension to the curriculum. These activities develop the three key questions:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- How do you organise learning?
- How do you know you have achieved your aims?

In 2008 we worked on a similar publication with schools and stakeholders called *Sustainable development in action*. This demonstrates how schools are introducing the DCSF Sustainable Schools framework across their curriculum.

We are also developing guidance for the other dimensions on the *National curriculum* website and an overview publication will be launched at the National Dimensions conference in March 2009. This publication will demonstrate the role of dimensions across the curriculum and consider how they can interact.

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Providing for 14–19 students

QCA aim: To create a high quality and rounded curriculum experience that embraces the 14–19 reforms, including the teaching of Diplomas and revised A levels from 2008 and revised GCSEs starting in 2009.

QCA challenge: To help centres to deliver the 14–19 reforms and give learners the full flexibility and range of options that these provide.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- develop guidance for the second phase of the Diplomas
- provide information on progression routes for Diploma learners and how Diplomas relate to existing qualifications
- accredit qualifications for the next five lines of learning and for the revised GCSEs
- develop case studies to show how the new key stage 4 curriculum can be developed to incorporate Diplomas
- continue to build the 14–19 evidence base through focus groups, seminars, local authority conferences and visits to case study schools
- carry out a five-year study of the 11–19 curriculum using 45 case study schools across the country to evaluate the interactions between all of the curriculum initiatives for 11- to 19-year-olds.

What we did in 2008

We accredited 296 GCSEs across 60 subjects and consulted on the criteria for new English, mathematics and ICT GCSEs for first teaching in 2010. We also accredited the phase two Diploma lines of learning and finalised the criteria for the phase three Diploma lines of learning.

We collected evidence at local authority conferences, case study schools' seminars and focus groups to look at equalities issues in schools, the effect of the new qualifications on post-16 institutions, and implementation plans for the 2008 reform programme.

We developed general guidance on the Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas that will support the more detailed guidance available from awarding bodies.

We also began creating a qualification feedback system for the Diploma programme so consortia can tell us, and share with each other, their experiences of Diploma teaching, learning and assessment.

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To increase participation and achievement in mathematics post-14, we published a factsheet on mathematics in the new secondary curriculum and distributed it to delegates at conferences, and through subject associations and other networks, to over 10,000 people. We also developed, and consulted on, the new subject criteria for GCSE mathematics for introduction in 2010. Finally, we began to collect case studies from a wide range of schools showing how enrichment activities could be embedded in schemes of work as a way of making the opportunities in the new programme of study available to all learners. Case studies and guidance material will be available in 2009.

We also created guidance to support the initial delivery of the Diplomas, including:

- *Curriculum guidance for delivering principal learning in the Diploma (phase two)*
This web-based guidance for teachers and curriculum planners sets out each Diploma development partnership's line of learning.
- *Opportunities for co-learning: Foundation and Higher Diploma*
This guidance explains the importance of the Foundation Diploma as a qualification in its own right, but sees the need for co-learning for the Foundation and Higher Diplomas in some situations; it

gives an example from each of the phase one lines of learning to show how co-learning might be achieved.

- *Guidelines on recording personal, learning and thinking skills in the Diploma*
These help those involved in planning and delivering Diploma programmes to record PLTS in teaching and learning, so learners can identify strengths and areas for development.
- *Progression illustrations*
These give examples of possible progression routes from phase one lines of learning into higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

■ *Guidance on mathematics and science content in principal learning*

This web-based guidance helps curriculum planners and practitioners to understand the mathematics and science content of the phase one and phase two Diplomas, its relationship with key stage 4, GCSEs and A levels and the prior learning needed to access the content.

■ *Guidance on opportunities to use English skills in creative and media principal learning*

This web-based guidance highlights opportunities to develop English language and literacy skills for those delivering the creative and media Diploma principal learning.

■ *Design for success: shaping your curriculum to incorporate the Diploma*

This guidance gives useful suggestions on introducing the Diploma. There is a booklet on curriculum planning and several inserts including: 'Progression through the Diploma (14–19)', 'Whole-school examples', 'Creative approaches to key stage 4 curriculum planning' and 'Incorporation of functional skills and post-16 Diploma delivery'.

We have also redeveloped the 14–19 learning webpages, which provide clear guidance for all 14–19 stakeholders. These can be accessed at www.qca.org.uk/qca_4321.aspx

Our aims for 2009

In 2009 we aim to:

- develop high quality qualifications for phase three Diploma lines of learning and for the revised GCSEs in English, mathematics and ICT
- continue developing our guidance programme to support Diploma consortia, including guidance for phase three and phase four lines of learning
- provide guidance for teachers introducing new GCSE and A level courses
- use focus groups, case study schools' seminars, the qualifications feedback system and local authority conferences to gather evidence on the impact of 14–19 reforms, which will strengthen our planning and support activities
- develop a support programme for centres on equality issues
- communicate with centres using the 14–19 web portal as the main point of access for all matters relating to the delivery of the 14–19 reforms, including a database of case studies and good practice guidance.

Thinking primary and early years

QCA aim: To develop a modern, world-class curriculum and assessment system that inspires and challenges all children in the primary phase of schooling and prepares them for further learning and for the future.

QCA challenge: To develop the best primary curriculum possible that builds on the success of previous curriculum development both in the early years foundation stage and in secondary to ensure coherence for all learners.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- further strengthen our primary curriculum evidence base by researching a range of effective primary curriculum models and commissioning small action research projects
- continue to collect examples of different primary curricula, including international models, as more schools begin to innovate and redesign effectively – this will help us find out common curriculum ingredients
- continue to speak with learners to understand the ways the curriculum affects and influences their learning
- make sure we continue to make the best use of the evidence we collect from headteachers, teachers, governors and other key partners

- arrange small-scale investigations to hear the views of two important groups that have been harder for us to reach in the past: parents, carers and guardians who do not usually attend school meetings and disaffected learners.

What we did in 2008

We knew from the evidence we gathered during 2007 that there was still much to be done to ensure that the primary curriculum met the needs of all learners.

We were therefore delighted that the secretary of state gave QCA the remit to support Sir Jim Rose in his independent review of the primary curriculum. QCA has been asked, as part of this review, to take the leading role in providing the necessary evidence, developing the programmes of study and managing the associated consultations.

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As the Children's Plan makes clear, this is the most fundamental review of the primary curriculum for a decade. The Children's Plan states:

'Nothing is more important than the body of essential knowledge, skills and understanding we choose as a nation to pass on to our young people. The primary curriculum must... develop the essential reading, writing, numeracy and personal skills pupils need in order to learn and develop. It must [also] provide all pupils with a broad and balanced entitlement to learning which encourages

creativity and inspires in them a commitment to learning that will last a lifetime.'

The remit has asked the review to consider how best to develop a primary curriculum that inspires commitment to learning and improves standards by:

- reducing prescription and increasing flexibility so that schools have more opportunity to tailor their teaching and learning
- enabling schools to concentrate on developing essential reading, writing and numeracy skills
- giving all learners the opportunity to experience a broad and balanced curriculum
- encouraging a greater emphasis on whole child development
- focusing on improving progression and smoothing transition.

Since being given the remit to support the review, QCA has collated existing evidence on primary curricula, including international evidence from our International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks (INCA) internet archive and network (www.inca.org.uk). We have also gained the views of thousands of headteachers, curriculum managers and teachers and insights from visits to hundreds of schools. We have also taken on board outcomes from seminars with key stakeholders, a wide ranging literature review and the views of thousands of children. This evidence points to at least 12 characteristics of an effective curriculum that the review was asked to consider. These are that an effective curriculum:

- is grounded by a set of aims and design principles
- challenges, inspires, engages and motivates all learners
- promotes personal development, skills and attitudes
- expresses the essential knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that we want our children to acquire in broader areas of learning

- is expressed as a common national framework to promote flexibility and personalisation
- is the entire planned learning experience
- promotes a wide repertoire of teaching and learning approaches
- makes clear progression expectations
- is built on a solid understanding of child development
- is supported by assessment, which is integral to teaching and learning, offers children useful feedback and engages them actively in the learning process
- promotes evaluation at all levels
- is based on clear education outcomes.

As well as collecting evidence to support the review, QCA worked closely with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders to help develop proposals for a more appropriate curriculum framework. We tested these proposals with 160 co-development schools from across the country and have been guided by our headteacher advisory group. We also asked the

Council for Subject Associations to comment on our proposals. To see a list of some of the organisations that QCA has worked with to develop the proposals, turn to page 40.

As a result of this research, QCA outlined four broad curriculum designs: subject based, areas of learning based, skills based and theme based. Each curriculum type had its strengths, however QCA concluded that no single design offered the full range of opportunities essential for learners. All children should be entitled to focused, skilled, specialist subject teaching and have the opportunity to enjoy rich, thematic teaching that makes connections between subjects. All children are entitled to progressive development of essential skills such as reading and writing, and wider skills such as the ability to self-manage and work with others.

To create a curriculum fit for the 21st century we advised the independent review of the primary curriculum that we need a new architecture that builds on the strengths of all the existing designs. This work, and a link to the *Interim report of the independent review of the primary*

curriculum can be found at www.qca.org.uk/thinkingprimary

In addition to our work supporting the review, we:

- introduced new schemes of work for key stage 2 to support primary languages teaching across French, German and Spanish, which can be found at www.qca.org.uk/mflschemes
- set up an evidence gathering project to monitor the national impact of the early years foundation stage
- brought in the early years foundation stage exemptions process

- built on, and enhanced, the principles and approaches of the early years foundation stage throughout our work.

Our aims for 2009

In 2009, we aim to:

- carry on seeking the views of stakeholders on current developments in the independent review of the primary curriculum
- run a statutory consultation, subject to ministerial approval, to seek national support for the new curriculum framework

- develop the *National curriculum* website to reflect the new primary curriculum and meet the needs of curriculum planners and teachers
- work closely with the DCSF and other system leaders on a range of implementation strategies
- collect case studies of good practice for the new *National curriculum* website
- plan an impact assessment strategy prior to the new curriculum being introduced
- support the introduction and development of the early years foundation stage.

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Developing new approaches to assessment

QCA aim: To develop new approaches to assessment that support curriculum innovation in schools and have a positive impact on teaching, learning and learners' progress.

QCA challenge: To promote a new conversation about assessment that will help schools put the learner at the heart of assessment.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- complete the assessing pupils' progress (APP) materials to support periodic teacher assessment in reading, writing and mathematics across key stages 1, 2 and 3
- work with the National Strategies to promote the introduction of the APP approach in schools across the country
- pilot the use of the APP approach in science and ICT at key stage 3
- extend our co-development work with schools to create models for whole school assessment practices, which will improve the curriculum and have a positive impact on pupil achievement
- explore the potential of e-assessment, including the use of e-portfolios, for new approaches to capturing and using evidence

- develop a model of progression in personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that clearly indicates the expectations at different key stages, while being flexible enough to accompany existing skills progression models
- create and trial new approaches to assessing Shakespeare that will encourage lively and active teaching and provide a range of assessment evidence.

What we did in 2008

Teachers have welcomed the chance to engage in the new conversation about assessment. More and more schools are beginning to think in new ways about where assessment fits into the bigger picture of the curriculum. There's a growing feeling that assessment should be more flexible – that it should focus on progress, fully involve learners and reflect their individual needs.

As part of our ongoing work to support effective methods of teacher assessment linked to national standards, we completed the piloting of APP in the primary phase. The key stage 2 materials

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were made available to schools in January 2008 and these will be supplemented by key stage 1 materials from January 2009.

APP materials for key stage 3 English and mathematics were fully revised and made available to schools on the *Secondary National Strategy* website in October 2008.

We worked with a group of pilot local authorities and schools to trial and evaluate a range of moderation models for APP that help to establish standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

To support the introduction of APP, we contributed to national, regional and local conferences throughout 2008 to ensure that senior leaders understand the principles and practicalities of APP in their schools.

We also produced a short booklet summarising the APP approach, which can be found at www.qca.org.uk/qca_19890.aspx

We worked with a range of secondary schools to gain evidence of pupils' learning to exemplify national standards in all statutory subjects.

We also worked with a range of strategic partners and primary and secondary schools to develop approaches to assessing citizenship using the new level descriptions for the subject.

We also worked with key partners including the DCSF, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust

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(SSAT) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to develop clear messages about how assessment needs to be built into curriculum design.

To support this work we created four key principles that underpin good assessment practice in schools.

- The learner is at the heart of assessment.
- Assessment gives a view of the whole learner.
- Assessment is integral to teaching and learning.
- Assessment includes reliable judgements about how learners are doing related, where appropriate, to national standards.

We continued to work with 30 schools in three local authorities to give examples of how schools have re-thought their current assessment practices and explored different ways of how to

look at what learners do and say. This included thinking about assessment in terms of:

- **day-to-day** – including information that teachers gain from conversations with learners about their work, as well as ongoing marking and peer and self-assessment
- **periodic** – reviewing performance over a period of time and taking into account evidence in a range of forms drawn from day-to-day assessment
- **transitional** – providing a formal recognition of achievement and valuable information for a learner's next teacher, most often at the end of a year or key stage.

This work has helped us develop the assessment section of the *National curriculum* website, which now includes guidance and case studies of whole school assessment models that:

- include manageable routines that fit the rhythm of the assessment year
- ensure assessment data is used purposefully to help teaching and learners' progress
- create new ways of capturing evidence that can be fitted into classroom practice flexibly.

The revised assessment section of the *National curriculum* website can be found at curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/

We looked at how learning platforms and e-portfolios can be used to capture a wider range of assessment evidence, increase the involvement of the learner in the assessment process and provide a more rounded picture of the whole child. We also worked with schools to explore how best to make use of e-assessment.

We created a progression model in PLTS that indicates the level of challenge expected in the different PLTS at each key stage. This gives schools the flexibility to develop their own scales or continue with existing ones, but still anchor their work to national expectations.

Finally, we began work with Shakespeare's Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company to produce a range of innovative tasks for assessing Shakespeare that are being trialled in schools. These are designed to support teacher assessment and encourage lively and active teaching of Shakespeare.

Our aims for 2009

In 2009, we aim to:

- extend assessment involvement, including allowing parents, carers, guardians and other relevant adults beyond the school to contribute to their child's assessment, and involving learners in actively managing evidence of their own achievement
- work with schools to develop models and materials for day-to-day and periodic assessment for all subjects, explaining how to recognise learners' knowledge, skills and understanding
- consider how we can help parents, carers, guardians and learners understand national expectations and how to improve.

'We see the new conversation on assessment as the start of a journey with a clear vision of what we want to achieve – a greater understanding of children's learning and what we need to do in response to our assessment of this.'

Mary Watts, headteacher of Appleton Primary School in Oxfordshire

'APP has resuscitated discussion and understanding of assessment. For teachers it has made assessment simpler, leading to much better marking, report writing, and discussion with parents and governors.'

Adrian Jackson, Senior Adviser for 11–19 learning in West Sussex

Using and enhancing the evidence base

QCA aim: To continue to build the evidence base for a future world-class curriculum, including evaluating the impact of new reforms.

QCA challenge: To use this evidence base to support all of QCA's work and influence other system leaders and partners.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- encourage schools to carry out action research to develop their curriculum
- work with initial teacher education providers to involve trainee teachers in the research process
- work with partner agencies to collect and use evidence more effectively
- create an evidence base to support the independent review of the primary curriculum
- begin to evaluate the secondary curriculum reforms.

What we did in 2008

We achieved a better balance between collecting information on what is happening and information that evaluates impact. We managed large-scale surveys, conducted research projects and in-depth probes, gathered evidence from our co-development networks and continued with our cross-organisational evidence advisory panel.

Large-scale surveys

In 2008 QCA collected the views of nearly 3,000 primary and secondary learners. The questionnaire covered a range of themes, including:

- challenge, inspiration and motivation
- flexibility and choice
- learner lifestyles and health
- what they would like to see in the future
- learner independence

This was followed up by focus groups with young people to explore issues that could not effectively be dealt with by a survey, and to draw out the views of some learners who were unlikely or unable to participate.

Some interesting points emerged from both the learner survey and the focus groups. Most learners are reasonably content with the current curriculum. The majority felt that the curriculum takes account of what they know already, is varied, contains a lot of practical activity and draws on out-of-school experiences.

But there was room for improvement. They would like to increase the number of varied lessons, the number and range of

practical activities and working with people from outside school.

Not every learner is given the appropriate level of challenge – 31 per cent of respondents said lessons were too easy and 17 per cent said they were too hard.

Learners feel that they have insufficient say in the curriculum they experience. Over 70 per cent of both primary and secondary learners said they wanted more choice and influence in terms of what and where they learn and who they learn with.

Parents, carers and guardians place significant expectations on most learners – 85 per cent of learners thought their parents wanted them to do well at school, 30 per cent felt that parental pressure was too much while 22 per cent felt that parents put too little pressure on them. Seventeen

per cent felt that teachers could expect more from them.

Finally, dealing with stress was felt to be the least developed aspect of personal wellbeing education.

The full report of learners' views can be downloaded at www.qca.org.uk/qca_13579.aspx

QCA also collected the views of nearly 2,000 teachers across both the primary and the secondary phase.

Some of the key findings from these reports included:

- Over three out of five primary respondents wanted:
 - more opportunity to apply skills across the curriculum
 - more flexibility to tailor learning to individuals and local circumstances
 - more opportunity to make links between subjects.

■ Primary teachers most often chose communication, speaking and listening skills as their biggest priorities in developing personal skills in pupils.

■ Other skills that were often seen as high priority included conflict resolution, empathy, respect and tolerance, confidence and self-esteem and taking responsibility for their own actions and learning.

Research projects and in-depth probes

In 2008 QCA embarked on a range of small projects and inquiries to collect information from particular groups.

We conducted a research project to study classroom teachers' assessment methods, to see how teachers' understandings about

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learning and assessment shaped their teaching. Six key characteristics of practice were found:

- a focus on pupils in learning and assessment processes
- clear curriculum and assessment structures that allow for innovation, personalisation and creativity
- an assessment system within engaging and relevant learning activities
- assessment feedback occurring in a range of learning activities
- integration of varied assessment approaches
- using the learning environment as part of the assessment infrastructure.

We conducted a research project with schools that were using dialogue between learners as a tool in curriculum innovation. This study concluded that:

- each school curriculum needs to give children the chance to engage in effective dialogue
- teachers need to develop a clear rationale for linking group work, dialogue and the curriculum

- group work and dialogue can – and should – be used across the curriculum but it needs to be considered in the light of the three key questions:
 - a. What am I trying to achieve?
 - b. How do I organise to achieve that aim?
 - c. How will I know when I have achieved it?

We conducted a research project with secondary schools looking at continuing professional development (CPD), which concluded that:

- using curriculum development as a part of CPD makes teachers more aware of their own learning
- when curriculum development is clearly joined with school development priorities, it increases the impact
- when curriculum development work is done by teachers in groups, the range and diversity of professional opinions increases
- schools contain several specialists in curriculum development whose skills and experience may be being overlooked

- schools with established professional learning groups can support curriculum development and evaluate its contribution to improving student learning.

To view the case studies and final reports from each of these research projects, go to www.qca.org.uk/qca_17558.aspx

QCA also reviewed and mapped 68 existing reviews covering over 10,000 curriculum related studies. This told us that learning is most effective when:

- it is context-based
- it connects with young people’s experiences
- it involves group work, discussion and teamwork
- it builds on learners’ existing understandings and challenges their misconceptions
- it links subjects together
- teachers’ subject knowledge is good.

To view the research map, go to www.qca.org.uk/qca_17558.aspx

Other work

The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) reported their achievements to QCA. The summary report can be downloaded at www.qca.org.uk/qca_7882.aspx

We drew on evidence from our INCA internet archive and network (www.inca.org.uk) of over 20 countries worldwide. We completed new international comparative studies and we broadened our range of countries by developing a country archive for South Africa.

Other international work has included summaries of international data from curriculum publications, hosting international visits to QCA to exchange information on curriculum development and implementation, and leading an

international conference on developing learning outcomes for the curriculum.

Finally, a group of Curriculum Network schools carried out action research. This work was showcased at the Teaching and Learning Research Programme annual conference and from this work QCA will be publishing materials to help other schools in their action research projects in 2009.

Our aims for 2009

In 2009 we aim to:

- continue to build the national and international evidence base to guide our policy
- continue to survey a sample of schools and learners, and gather evidence directly

through visits to schools and discussion with stakeholders

- carry out in-depth studies into particular areas of interest and commission a small number of action research projects
- continue to work with parents, carers and guardians on curriculum issues
- plan an impact assessment strategy prior to the new curriculum being introduced
- begin to measure the impact of the new secondary curriculum and create a clear picture of its effects.

Curriculum co-development

QCA aim: To encourage the educational community to further challenge their own and others' understanding about curriculum aims, structures and measures of success to help them better meet the needs, interests and aspirations of their learners.

QCA challenge: To reinforce the opportunities that schools have to design a unique curriculum and to challenge schools to think about the needs of their learners.

'In all the schools visited where innovations had been well planned and delivered, evidence from lesson observations, data on pupils' progress, and feedback from teachers and pupils showed that the innovations were having a positive impact on pupils' achievement and personal development.'

Ofsted report on curriculum innovation in schools

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- involve a wider range of schools in co-development networks to ensure that we include a more diverse range of learner needs and backgrounds
- publish examples of curriculum innovation designed to meet the needs of all learners
- measure the impact that curriculum development and innovation has on learners.

What we did in 2008

- Fifty networks, representing nearly 1,000 schools, developed their curriculum in partnership with QCA – around 85 per cent of these schools were from the primary phase, covering 34 local authorities and all nine government regions.
- The work of curriculum co-development schools has influenced national policy on curriculum and contributed to QCA's advice and guidance to schools.
- Ofsted drew on the experiences of curriculum co-development schools as part of its work on curriculum innovation.
- The co-development programme evolved into the Curriculum Network to support the growing number of schools that wanted to get involved.
- Success stories were received from schools reporting clear evidence of their curriculum developments making a positive difference to learners.

- Schools reported improvements in learners' motivation as a result of the curriculum becoming more relevant and the introduction of more flexible approaches to learning.
- Schools also reported a significant impact on staff, particularly a greater sense of independence and creativity.

Curriculum co-development is not about change for the sake of it. It's about knowing what changes schools want to see in their learners and working out what they need to achieve this. In 2008, the schools involved in the co-development programme seized this message with enthusiasm and made sure that, before starting to change their curriculum, they:

- knew their learners' predominant characteristics, attitudes, skills and achievements
- had a vision of how they would like their learners to change as a result of their curriculum development.

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In 2008 QCA produced a report on the successes of the co-development networks to date and some case studies from the Bristol network. The full report can be downloaded from www.qca.org.uk/qca_16820.aspx but here are some of the highlights:

- The co-development schools are using a wide range of approaches to change the way they plan learning, including using QCA's *big picture of the curriculum* (see inside back cover) as the entire planned learning experience.

- The most common approach that schools used was to develop cross-curricular links.
- Nearly half the schools felt that changing their approach to planning and assessment had made the greatest difference to achieving their aims for learners.
- The other widespread change reported was the increased involvement of learners in their own planning and assessment.

The top five changes for 2008 were:

- taking a cross-curricular approach to learning
- focusing on developing learners' skills and attitudes
- giving young people a greater say in their learning
- using curriculum time more flexibly, for example blocking lessons
- focusing on the global dimension.

In 2008, with support from QCA, schools in the co-development programme evaluated curriculum change more effectively than ever before. Most schools used both informal evidence about their learners and hard data.

Many schools also planned 'reflection points', when they assessed the progress that learners made towards meeting goals and decided what to do next. In its report on curriculum innovation in schools, Ofsted highlighted the importance of this:

'The schools that were most successful in bringing about change... used rigorous and regular evaluation to ascertain the effectiveness of their actions and modified approaches where necessary, sometimes making changes to development plans.'

QCA offered a growing range of guidance to support curriculum development, including:

- substantial updates to the *Curriculum co-development toolkit*
- new webpages at www.qca.org.uk/curriculum
- a new termly e-newsletter: *Curriculum Network news*

All of these resources proved extremely popular with schools and helped to generate enthusiasm for curriculum development.

Moving forward with the Curriculum Network

With enthusiasm for curriculum development growing, QCA set up the Curriculum Network to give curriculum development a clearer identity and bring both individual schools and curriculum groups into a community of learners.

The key difference from the co-development programme is in the way schools share their experiences – all schools now provide detailed information online when they join the network. Ongoing evidence of curriculum development work is collected online – schools complete

electronic diaries on their curriculum journey and produce an annual report summarising their achievements.

Our aims for 2009

In 2009, we aim to:

- continue to use the Curriculum Network to help schools that want to lead the way in curriculum development and to shape QCA policy and guidance
- carry on promoting innovative practice across the Curriculum Network
- encourage schools to collect high-quality evidence of impact and share it widely
- use evidence from curriculum development to influence curriculum reviews
- develop and circulate guidance to support curriculum innovation
- publish three more issues of *Curriculum Network news* to share learning
- invite more schools from areas that are currently under-represented, such as London boroughs, to join the Curriculum Network.

'This is what I came into teaching for. I feel like a burden has been lifted off me and that I can enjoy my teaching again.'

primary teacher

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Strengthening partnerships

QCA aim: To work with all those who want to develop a modern world class curriculum and assessment system that inspires and challenges all learners and prepares them for the future.

QCA challenge: To help stakeholders see the mutual benefit in working with QCA.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- ensure better understanding of the needs and expectations of employers, including what measures employers would value, in addition to examination results
- consider how to involve social entrepreneurs and employers in the strategic direction of schools, curriculum planning and classrooms
- strengthen all our partnerships so that we could evaluate the impact of collaborative work
- encourage new partners to join with us so that shared expertise, knowledge and networks could be fully exploited in providing the best possible curriculum.

What we did in 2008

We held a series of group meetings with subject experts and education business partnership organisations (EBPOs). Discussions focused on employer engagement, curriculum and qualification developments in work-related learning, careers

education and enterprise and the new framework for economic wellbeing. From this we published *Career, work-related learning and enterprise 11–19*.

We gave schools guidance on introducing work-related learning. *Curriculum support from employers* looks at how employers can contribute to curriculum opportunities without making large demands on their time and how students can be given up-to-date knowledge about the world of work.

Through our ongoing partnerships with government agencies, employers, education leaders and school communities, we continued to develop a big picture of the curriculum as the entire planned learning experience that young people go through. We spoke to well over 15,000 people in presentations at more than 200 conferences including headteachers, deputies, subject leaders, local authority advisers, governors, trainee teachers, initial teacher education (ITE) providers and employers.

We also established formal agreements with the National Strategies (NS), Ofsted, the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the

National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the General Teaching Council (GTC), the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and BECTA to increase collaborative activity.

We ran a joint seminar with the Development Education Association (DEA), which brought together organisations such as Oxfam, Action Aid and the British Council to look at how the global dimension could be tied into the new primary curriculum. The DEA's Chief Executive, Hetan Shah, said:

'QCA's willingness to engage seriously with stakeholders with a wide range of expertise, such as with DEA on global learning, is extremely valuable and undoubtedly leads to positive outcomes for schools.'

We built on our previous engagement with governors during last year. Publishing *A curriculum for the 21st century: a governors' guide, 30 things a governing body can do to get involved with the curriculum* and supporting the National Governors' Association's conference, entitled 'Whose curriculum is it anyway?' were three ways that QCA helped governors to understand their role in shaping their school's curriculum.

We forged an ongoing relationship with three major ITE providers – the University of Cumbria, Roehampton University and the University of East London

– resulting in a film showing how primary trainee teachers can be agents of curriculum change. This film, and other work with ITE providers, can be accessed at www.qca.org.uk/qca_13579.aspx

A residential conference for primary ITE providers took place in April 2008 to explore the effects of curriculum change for starting teachers. Among the ideas explored were the development of ‘passionate experts’, ‘principled professionals’ and ‘contagious collaborators’.

To make sure that our aim ‘to challenge and inspire all learners’ is fully achieved, we set up a group to look at all aspects of the new secondary curriculum and the developing primary curriculum. The group includes representation from Stonewall, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Humanist Association, faith groups and agencies that support traveller children, disabled children and children with autism.

We worked with five primary schools in east Manchester to develop a community-based curriculum for their key stage 2 pupils. Initial findings suggest this is having a significant impact on learning, attendance and behaviour. Teachers felt that it had developed their creativity and played to their strengths and interests, and parents, carers and guardians have also been very supportive.

We worked closely with the DCSF, with faith/belief communities and with professional associations to promote our vision for RE as part of the curriculum. We also worked with the DCSF on writing new government guidance on RE, which links RE, wellbeing and the aims of the curriculum, and will be published in 2009.

The Cultural Offer was launched in 2007, which aims for all young people to have access to at least five hours of cultural experiences each week. QCA, alongside other key organisations, supported this project and the 10 areas that will pilot the government’s Find Your Talent programme.

The QCA Futures project (www.qca.org.uk/qca_6073.aspx) provided significant support for the secondary reforms introduced in 2008. Building on that work QCA is supporting the Futurelab project called Beyond Current Horizons. This project aims to ensure that the UK education system has identified and prepared for a wide range of potential social, technological and cultural futures beyond 2025.

On 13 May 2008 schools and organisations from across the country gathered in London to celebrate the achievements of the Controversial Issues and Values Network – a curriculum co-development network set up to explore how controversial issues can be addressed through the curriculum. Teachers and learners explored issues such as racism in the school and in the local community, student voice, discrimination against gypsy-roma travellers and school closure.

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Our aims for 2009

In 2009, we aim to:

- strengthen our relationship with governors by developing case studies of their experiences and by producing *Governors – the Movie*, showcasing schools that have worked effectively with them.
- extend our involvement with ITE providers by hosting two national ITE conferences on the changing nature of subject knowledge and on the effects of the Children’s Plan for trainers of the entire children’s workforce.
- help schools link equalities with community cohesion at a major conference. We will also link more of our projects with Young Foundation initiatives to make sure that they have a real impact on community pride and on the quality of individual lives.
- continue to extend our work with employers to ensure their voice is heard in all aspects of our curriculum and assessment work.

Engaging with young people and parents, carers and guardians

QCA aims: To involve all young people in discussion to influence the curriculum and its assessment.

To encourage parents, guardians and carers to share their views about what helps their children learn.

QCA challenge: To find ways of connecting with hard to reach families and young people to ensure that parents, guardians and carers, governors and the wider community have a clearer understanding of the curriculum.

Our aims for 2008

We said that we would:

- look at how to capture the enthusiasm of the widest range of young people, including using technology, music and the media
- think of innovative ways of engaging with a more diverse group of parents, carers, guardians and the wider community
- find ways of circulating these key messages to those who plan, shape and write the curriculum
- inspire schools and stakeholders to consider the learner messages when planning
- continue to promote the *big picture of the curriculum* to support young people in creating a learner's version of this tool.

What we did in 2008

We held two national platform events, four regional events and a residential with over 200 learners to involve them in discussions about their curriculum. The outcomes have:

- been used to inform the independent review of the primary curriculum
- enabled QCA to develop a curriculum toolkit to ensure that personal development permeates the curriculum
- enabled QCA to create a young person's 'big picture' to influence stakeholders, including schools, in developing the curriculum for this age group

A diverse range of young people contributed to all of these events, including year 5, 6 and 7 learners from pupil referral units. This work, including video footage of the events, can be seen at www.qca.org.uk/qca_14945.aspx

We talked to a range of young people about their curriculum. These young people from across the country were aged 7 to 16 and at risk of exclusion. Some of these young people were in mainstream

schools and some were in pupil referral units. The outcomes are being used to improve access to the primary and secondary curriculum for all groups and individuals.

We visited a range of mainstream and special schools to talk to young people with additional needs to find out what barriers to learning they have experienced and what has helped them to learn. They were all clear about their desire to learn and to

achieve and gave examples of how group work, active lessons and talking with the teacher about their work helped them.

We continued to work with Cedar Mount High School and MANCAT FE College in Manchester on the PEARL (personal employability, achievement and reflection for learning) research programme to see if working towards this qualification will help them become more successful as learners, confident as individuals

and responsible as citizens. As part of this work, skills are assessed with the young person and their tutor in 'family' meetings. Young people identified relationships as key to successful progress and some of their comments have included: 'They don't just tell you what to do, they sit there and go through it with you all the time', 'PEARL tells you what sort of person you are' and 'I wouldn't talk to the teachers at school. Here I can talk to everyone'.

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We asked children from a group of schools in Barrow-in-Furness (Victoria Junior School, Thornccliffe School, Parkview School, Dowdales School and St. Bernard's Catholic High School) to conduct action research to find out what they thought about the curriculum in their schools. The final report from the project, called *Linking learning for life – voices of the future* can be downloaded from www.qca.org.uk/qca_18247.aspx

We set up a blog with year 6 pupils at Wroxham School (www.wroxham.herts.sch.uk) to gather their views, and their parents, carers and guardians' views, about the curriculum. This began in September 2008 and the findings from this work will be published in 2009.

We worked closely with mumsnet (www.mumsnet.com) and Families Need Fathers (www.fnf.org.uk) to ask 2,000 parents, carers and guardians for their views on the primary curriculum. The findings from the questionnaire will be available in 2009 and will feed into the final report to Sir Jim Rose and the independent review of the primary curriculum.

Finally, we continued to work with Bristol and Sandwell local authorities to engage with parents, carers and guardians. This work, which started during the secondary curriculum review in 2007, is continuing and a final report will be available on the QCA website in 2009.

Our aims for 2009

In 2009 we aim to:

- hold a primary platform event for parents, carers and guardians to raise the profile of the emerging primary curriculum and encourage further involvement and participation
- ask people who had previously not been in education, employment or training what would have helped them be more successful
- gather the views of parents, carers, guardians and learners on the impact of the new secondary curriculum one year after its introduction
- extend the blog trial to other schools across the country so that more learners and parents, carers and guardians can tell us how the curriculum can be improved and developed.

Some of the organisations that have been consulted on the primary curriculum proposals so far:

Action on Smoking and Health
Association of Professionals in Education and Children’s Trusts
Association of School and College Leaders
Bishop Grosseteste University College
British Association for Early Childhood Education
British Council for School Environments
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
Building Schools for the Future, Canterbury Christ Church University
Clear Vision Trust
ContinYou
Council for Subject Associations*
Creative Partnerships
Cumbria school centred initial teacher education
Early Education
Engaging Places

ESCalate
Family and Parenting Institute
Farming and Countryside Education
Field Studies Council
General Teaching Council for England
Girlguiding UK
Heritage Lottery Fund
Improvement and Development Agency for local government
Information for School and College Governors
King’s College London
Learning through Landscapes
Liverpool Hope University
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
Manchester Metropolitan University
Mantle of the Expert
National Association of Advisers in Computer Education
National Advisers and Inspectors Group for Science
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association for Primary Education

National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
National Childminding Association
National Children’s Bureau
National College of School Leadership
National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
National Coordinators of Governor Services
National Education Business Partnerships Network
National Enterprise Network
National Governors’ Association
National Healthy Schools Programme
National Maritime Museum
National Primary Headteachers’ Association
National Primary Schools’ Association
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
National Trust, National Union of Teachers
Natural England
Office for Standards in Education
Office of the Children’s Commissioner

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Osteopathic Centre for Children
The Personal, Social and Health Education Association
Play England
Primary National Strategy
Professional Association of Teachers
Roehampton University
Scout Association
Service Children’s Education
Somerset school centred initial teacher education

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
Suzy Lamplugh Trust
Training and Development Agency for Schools
Universities’ Council for the Education of Teachers
University of Brighton
University of Cumbria
University of Derby
University of East London
University of Manchester

University of Plymouth
Woodland Trust
WWF-UK
along with a range of local authorities and a number of spiritual groups.
** representing many of the subject associations in England*

Resources

**Publications available at
www.qca.org.uk/orderline
Tel: 08700 60 60 15**

QCA (2008) Assessing pupils’ progress: Assessment at the heart of learning
(QCA/08/3867)

QCA (2008) Disciplined curriculum innovation
(QCA/08/3862)

QCA (2008) The new secondary curriculum: personal learning and thinking skills
(QCA/08/3606)

QCA (2008) The new secondary curriculum: compelling learning experiences
(QCA/08/3607)

QCA (2008) The new secondary curriculum: cross-curriculum dimensions
(QCA/08/3605)

QCA (2006) The curriculum: QCA looks forward
available to download at
www.qca.org.uk/qca_5395.aspx

QCA (2007) The curriculum: taking stock of progress
available to download at
www.qca.org.uk/qca_7069.aspx

QCA (2007) The curriculum: building on success
available to download at
www.qca.org.uk/qca_17135.aspx

Career, work-related learning and enterprise 11–19
(QCA/08/3980)

Websites

14–19 learning:
www.qca.org.uk/qca_4321.aspx

Beyond current horizons:
www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk

CfBT website to support the secondary curriculum:
www.newsecondarycurriculum.org

Curriculum development work:
www.qca.org.uk/curriculum

Curriculum for the Diploma:
www.qca.org.uk/qca_13470.aspx

Curriculum conversations:
www.qca.org.uk/qca_13579.aspx

Department for Children, Schools and Families:
www.dcsf.gov.uk

Development Education Association:
www.dea.org.uk/

Every Child Matters:
www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Families Need Fathers
www.fnf.org.uk

International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks:
www.inca.org.uk

Learning and Skills Improvement Service:
www.lsis.org.uk

Linking learning for life – voices of the future:
www.qca.org.uk/qca_20347.aspx
Mumsnet:
www.mumsnet.com

National College of School Leadership:
www.ncsl.org.uk

National Curriculum website:
curriculum.qca.org.uk

Ofsted Curriculum innovation in schools
www.qca.org.uk/qca_16820.aspx/

Secondary National Strategy:
www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/framework/

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust:
www.ssatrust.org.uk

Thinking Primary:
www.qca.org.uk/thinkingprimary

Wroxham School:
www.wroxham.herts.sch.uk

The curriculum: progress and opportunities looks back on QCA's curriculum objectives for 2008 and summarises what has been achieved since then. It provides the rationale behind the current priorities and sets out QCA's curriculum aims for 2009.



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