

Curriculum for Excellence – the Senior Phase

A Statement from the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board



Vision for the Curriculum for Excellence Senior Phase

The Management Board is fully committed to the vision for the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence set out in *Building the Curriculum 3* and subsequent papers and that is:

In the senior phase (approx 15-18) all young people can expect the entitlements to be delivered, whatever their individual interests and needs, wherever their learning is taking place. They are entitled to:

- > *a curriculum which is **coherent**;*
- > *the opportunity to obtain **qualifications** as well as to continue to develop the attributes and capabilities of the **four capacities**;*
- > *opportunities to develop **skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work** with a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing;*
- > ***personal support** to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities that Curriculum for Excellence can provide; and*
- > *support in moving to a **positive and sustained destination** beyond school.*

The Management Board is clear that the senior phase can only be successful if local authorities, schools, colleges and their partners work together on the planning and delivery.

Principles

The Curriculum for Excellence Principles for Curriculum Design in *Building the Curriculum 3* apply in full to the design of a senior phase and these are:

Challenge and Enjoyment
Breadth
Progression
Depth
Personalisation and Choice
Coherence
Relevance

The senior phase builds firmly on the Experiences and Outcomes a young person will have experienced and achieved through the broad general education. All young people should continue to experience all of the above Curriculum for Excellence principles in their senior phase.

Designing the Framework for Delivery

Partners are expected to work together to plan a coherent experience for learners. Schools, colleges and their partners should build a flexible system that offers personalisation and choice, providing clear and supported pathways for young people to make a successful transition and to continue learning throughout the senior phase. The S3 profile will summarise each learner's achievements from the broad general education and so help this transition.

Exciting developments are under way across Scotland. A range of models have been published offering examples of some of the ways schools are currently planning for the senior phase including:

- > planning for a single S4–S6 cohort (rather than separate year groups);
- > planning different pathways for progression to meet the varying needs of the range of learners;
- > planning a range of ways young people can develop a portfolio of qualifications and other achievements;
- > embedding key aspects of Curriculum for Excellence such as maximising time for teaching and learning by bypassing lower level qualifications; and
- > enhancing the range of progression routes through college programmes, joint college and school approaches and neighbouring school collaborative approaches to curriculum planning.

These models can be found at www.ltscotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/curriculumplans/secondary.asp



The Senior Phase – Issues for Clarification

The Management Board wants to support all schools and their partners to develop senior phase models which will work effectively in their context, capitalising fully on the flexibility and new opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence provides. We recognise that there are some common issues and concerns which require clarification. The Board hopes the following will be helpful.

Concern 1 – The Curriculum for Excellence timetable is too tight

At the February 2011 meeting Management Board reviewed the position. The substantial majority view was that there is no reason to depart from any aspect of the Curriculum for Excellence programme, including the timetable for delivery of the new qualifications.

Maintaining the timetable is important – not least because the new qualifications will be designed to ensure those in S1 in 2010/11 can progress smoothly from the Experiences and Outcomes on to qualifications which articulate with them. However, it has been agreed that where a subject department (not a whole school) is not ready to introduce the new qualifications in 2013/14, they can **on an exceptional basis** (and by agreement with their local authority) present pupils for Intermediate in 2014 (since they will still be available for a small number of other candidates in S5/6).

Details of qualifications will be provided to a timetable which allows for delivery in S4 from 2013/14. Some practitioners would prefer to have additional detail on the qualifications now in order to plan for S3 courses in 2012/13. However, the new qualifications are being built upon the Experiences and Outcomes, and learning and teaching delivery for S3 can be planned with confidence on the basis that the broad general education in S1–S3 will articulate to the new qualifications from S4. These new qualifications are being designed to ensure this is the case.

Concern 2 – It will not be possible for schools to deliver the range of provision which a diverse group of senior phase learners will need

Schools, colleges and other learning providers currently work in partnership to plan and deliver a curriculum that offers a range of learning options for young people. Partnership working is the best way of delivering a senior phase that meets the needs of a diverse range of learners and Curriculum for Excellence places an even greater focus than before on joint planning and delivery. The Management Board is clear that schools are not solely responsible for all of the provision offered in the senior phase but that they have a key role in bringing together their partners to plan and deliver a coherent curriculum that offers opportunities for learners to develop their knowledge and skills across a range of different contexts and settings. 16+ Learning Choices is an integral part of Curriculum for Excellence and ensures that every young person who wants one is given an appropriate offer of post-16 learning.

Concern 3 – Presentation for qualifications will continue to be a year on year progression

One of the key aims of Curriculum for Excellence is to reduce the quantity of assessment which pupils undertake, particularly in the senior phase. Many schools are planning for the senior phase as a 2 or 3 year experience. The majority of pupils are staying on to at least S5, so it is no longer appropriate to view S4 in isolation or to see presentation for qualifications in S4 as a “given” for each learner in each subject. Schools may well take the opportunity this provides to offer National Courses over 2 years. Bypassing qualifications at National 4 and moving straight to National 5 or Higher is likely to become increasingly common, although this may be a gradual process. It will also be important to ensure that those young people who choose to leave school at the end of S4 or at Christmas of S5 are appropriately catered for in terms of qualifications.



Concern 4 – Young people’s learning will be narrowed because they will only be able to do 5 qualification subjects in S4 rather than the 8 they can typically study at the present time

The concern that Curriculum for Excellence limits young people to 5 subjects in S4 is perhaps the most common misunderstanding about the senior phase. This relates in part to the fact that SQA National Courses are based on a notional 160 hours of directed study starting in S4. However, while S1–S3 will be designed to provide a broad, general education, there will be scope for increasing depth and specialisation in particular subjects through choices made during that time. Although formal qualifications will not begin before S4, learning which takes place in the broad general education can and should contribute to the learning for qualifications. National curriculum levels attained will be recorded within the S3 profile and, of course, success in subjects not continued into the senior phase will also be recognised at the end of S3. Schools should bear in mind when planning the senior phase that it may be in the best interests of many of their young people to bypass National 4/5 and begin learning for Highers in S4.

Management Board welcomes the emerging picture of bespoke senior phase models. These show that some schools will plan for 5 or 6 subjects in S4 – viewing it as a way of facilitating deeper learning, making space for recognising wider achievements and providing scope for taking qualifications over differing timescales, e.g. 2-year Highers. Other schools may prefer to offer, for example, 8 courses of study in S4 with the option of being presented for all 8 in S4 or deferring several subjects in S4, knowing that further study in these subjects will continue in S5. Similarly, some pupils may defer presentation in a subject in S5 until S6. The guiding principle is that qualifications are taken at the appropriate stage for the individual young person over the 3 years of the senior phase.

The precise number and range of qualifications on offer, as well as when they are taken, will be a decision for schools to take in consultation with learners and parents. These decision will be informed by assessment of learning through the broad general education which will be captured in the S3 profile. We strongly urge schools to take the opportunity the planning of the senior phase offers to inform parents and learners about the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. They will want to understand why changes are required and they will be seeking reassurance that opportunities will not be diminished. Equally importantly, it is a chance to enthuse parents and learners on the benefits and improvements which their school’s proposed model will bring.

Concern 5 – Early presentation is banned

One of the key aims of the senior phase is to reduce the assessment burden for students and staff. In this context, there is a general assumption that it is highly unlikely that cohorts or classes would be presented early. Learners should be presented for qualifications at the time which is right for them and it is neither wrong nor forbidden for individual learners to be presented early where this is in their best interests. The Scottish Government’s position on early presentation is set out in *Building the Curriculum 3*. This endorses the views of key stakeholders that early presentation for large year groups or whole classes narrows learning at too early a stage and can place undue pressure on those within the cohort who may lack the maturity for taking National Qualifications. Bypassing lower level qualifications can makes space for deeper learning. The Management Board remains clear that the decision on when to present an individual learner for a qualification must be left to the school to make in consultation with the learner.

Curriculum for Excellence is a major change to the education system in Scotland that aims to raise standards of learning and teaching for all 3-18-year-olds, wherever they learn. In this statement we sometimes use the term ‘parents’ for short – we mean all parents and carers. When we talk about ‘learners’ we mean all young people learning in school, college, community learning, training, special schools, extended support and secure settings.

