

LTS Corporate Profile

A Curriculum for Excellence



Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) is the organisation for the development and support of the Scottish curriculum and is at the heart of all the major developments in Scottish education, moving education forward in partnership with the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), local authorities and schools. This corporate profile focuses on the important role that LTS has had in A Curriculum for Excellence.

The work of A Curriculum for Excellence is being taken forward within a strong partnership between SEED, LTS, SQA and HMIE. The purpose of the programme is to improve the learning, attainment and achievement of all children and young people in Scotland. It is also about ensuring that pupils achieve on a broad front, not just in terms of examinations. It is important that children and young people acquire the full range of skills and abilities relevant to growing, living and working in the contemporary world. In this way they will enjoy greater choice and opportunity to realise their individual talents.

www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk

LTS supporting
a curriculum for excellence

No stage untouched

The curriculum used to be so simple: children would spend years learning how to think, write and speak well, and only then would they tackle particular subjects – arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music. So young people in those far-off days left school with most of the skills needed to make their mark in the world, and a fair chunk of its knowledge inside their heads.

Then along came the Renaissance, the dawn of the knowledge explosion. More or less ever since, education experts have been struggling to specify an ideal curriculum. As the world's knowledge increased, while the length of childhood remained roughly constant, starting early and packing more in seemed, for a long time, the only answer.

But squeezing out critical skills to make room for specialist knowledge made less sense as the centuries passed and knowledge just kept on growing. Influential voices were raised complaining that youngsters were leaving school knowing more but understanding less. They had difficulty constructing logical arguments. They couldn't separate facts from fiction. They had been taught many things; but they had not learned how to learn.

So countries around the world set about modernising and streamlining their curricula. Scotland, whose education system has always been highly regarded, both nationally and internationally, started from a sound basis. We wanted to build on this and develop it, by preparing learners aged 3–18 for the world of the 21st century. We began with an examination of the very purpose of a school curriculum. The answer that emerged was 'to enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors'.

Already this represented a break with tradition. Previous, limited, curricular reform had always started from the structure of knowledge rather than the nature of the child – who was still regarded as a passive, empty vessel into which huge amounts of knowledge had to be poured. Instead, from this modern Scottish perspective, children are lively, quirky, energetic individuals who play a dynamic, ever-changing role in their own learning.

Year of engagement

But learners, no matter how active, still need teachers. So before any detailed steps were taken to reform the curriculum, it was vital to ensure the participation and engagement of the profession as a whole, in what was, in principle and intent, the most profound educational change for generations. Responsibility for this lay with Learning and Teaching Scotland, whose experience of managing change with Assessment is for Learning proved invaluable.



A Curriculum for Excellence Timeline

Visit the timeline at

www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/progress

'Encouraging people to open their horizons is a real challenge,' says Margo Williamson, Programme Director for Curriculum and Assessment. But Assessment is for Learning was a proven success in that respect. Practitioners began to really think about the learning and teaching taking place in their classrooms. So the change model and the strategies we developed there are being used and adapted to progressing A Curriculum for Excellence, drawing on the lessons everyone has learned.'

One very important lesson is that if teachers are simply provided with a set of practical techniques there is very little effect on classroom practice. But if they engage early with the big message, the underlying philosophy, then a lasting impact is far more likely. Dialogue is an essential part of this engagement, so teachers have been encouraged to share their opinions.

'We have visited every authority in Scotland, some many times over,' says national co-ordinator May Sweeney. 'We have spoken with thousands of teachers and managers about A Curriculum for Excellence. The objective, right from the start, was to inform and involve the profession.'

Learning and Teaching Scotland has effectively been the interface between the profession and the Programme Board, feeding back views and questions generated at workshops and seminars ranging from individual school level to clusters of schools, and even large-scale inter-authority events.

'We present where we have got to and how we have arrived there,' says May Sweeney. 'We explore opportunities, tease out ideas, and share current thinking and the ongoing work of the review groups. We listen to people's ideas about the challenges A Curriculum for Excellence will create for teachers, schools and local authorities.'

The reforms

The biggest doubt in teachers' minds goes to the heart of the intended reforms: The curriculum is bursting at the seams, and teachers are desperate for more time,

space and freedom to teach. They want classrooms to be lively, motivating and responsive to current events. They would like health-promotion, citizenship, enterprise and eco-schools to permeate the curriculum. They aim to be reflective professionals.

But all this means that guidance from the centre on what teachers should teach and how they should teach it must be less detailed and prescriptive than before. Teachers have, in the main, welcomed the news that they will no longer receive thick documents telling them precisely what to do. But many are interested in the shape of the new curriculum and how guidance will be formulated.

Answers to these questions will be worked out in detail during the year ahead, as Learning and Teaching Scotland builds on the foundations laid by the curriculum review groups. It is already clear, however, that although there were eight of these groups there will not be eight sets of guidelines.

'We will be looking at the big ideas in every area and identifying learning outcomes for each of them,' says Margo Williamson. 'In collaboration with our partners SEED, HMIE and the SQA, we will develop and pilot draft outcomes by working closely with schools and authorities. It will be another year of engagement at a more detailed level. At the end of it, we will publish learning outcomes that have been thoroughly tested by teachers and pupils.'

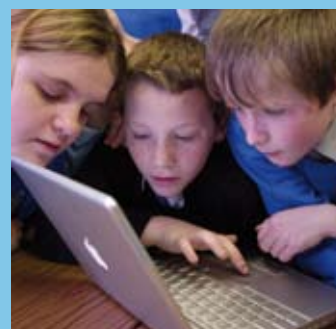
Pupil perspective

Major educational reforms take time, especially when the profession, for the first time ever, is closely involved at every step of the way. But for one key group of people in Scottish education, change is part of everyday life. The pupils seem to have no trouble grasping what the reforms are about, says May Sweeney:

'I was talking to an infant class about the purpose of the curriculum, and pointing out how they can be effective contributors right away – by contributing to the learning of the person next to them.

'I was trying to put it into really simple words the children could understand. But this wee 5-year-old decided I was taking far too long to get to the point, and he interrupted me:

'Miss,' he said. 'We just call that peer assessment.'



Further information

If you would like further information about A Curriculum for Excellence or copies of our other corporate profiles on Glow and Assessment is for Learning, please contact our Customer Services on 08700 100 297 or email enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk www.LTScotland.org.uk