

Curriculum for Excellence: Response to the publication of Experiences Outcomes

A guide for the Hutchesons' community

Where We Are

The Curriculum for Excellence has been a 'bottom up' consultative process over the course of the last 5 years. As such its prescriptions were not intended to be a 'top down' dictat for all to slavishly follow. Instead it established 4 capacities upon which to build a new curriculum: the curriculum would encourage the creation of "Successful Learners"; "Confident Individuals"; "Responsible Citizens"; "Effective Contributors" by educational institutions at all levels across Scotland. Several things might be said to be implied by this:

1. Any aspect of any curriculum at any level which did not contribute to making young people successful in how they learned, confident in their outlook and willingness to take on tasks, responsible in their participation in their communities and in how they conducted their lives or effective and purposeful in putting something back into communities, ought to be carefully looked at and jettisoned in favour of something that *would* underpin the four capacities.
2. It could be taken to suggest that, taken as a whole, the educational system in Scotland was failing to produce enough individuals with these characteristics (or capacities fulfilled) – the curriculum was mediocre, not excellent, as far as many young people in Scotland are concerned.
3. The pupil (or 'learner') is at the centre. In as much as this can be said to be more than a pleasant sounding platitude, it implies on the one hand that the place of a teacher, or given institutions, in the process of education might not be taken for granted and on the other that education is not there to serve wider cultural, economic or political agendas.
4. It is implied that the context of an unpredictable future and rapid technological, geographical and political change means that it is more important that young people emerge from the educational system with the values, instincts and 'soft skills' to adapt to whatever comes than for them to learn predetermined bodies of knowledge.

Despite point 3, the CfE has been gradually fleshed out by a process that has attempted to be reflective, collaborative and led *by* practitioners (ie teachers). If teachers are not to be at the centre, then they will be very close to it. It is also very likely that a range of political, economic and cultural agendas will have their part to play in determining what happens in schools. In the Building the Curriculum 3 document, 8 curriculum areas were 'prescribed' to be covered through whichever disciplines inside and outside the classroom and inside and outside school institutions might be employed for educational purposes.

These are:

- Language
- Mathematics

- Health and well being
- Social Sciences
- Technologies
- RME
- Sciences
- Expressive Arts

Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Well being should be the responsibility of all.

However, since Fiona Hyslop said at the launch of the Experiences and Outcomes at the end of March 2009 that the CfE is to be “as much about culture change as curriculum content” it *might* be implied that curriculum content does not necessarily need to change very much. Instead the minister suggests that we should as a profession, “spend time together, reflect, collaborate and be creative, exchange good practice and network within and between institutions”.

Experiences and Outcomes

Draft experiences and outcomes were published last year and a consultation process ended in October, with final Experiences and Outcomes being published on 2nd April 2009.

The following general points should be noted:

- The experiences and outcomes cover the totality of educational experiences that young people have from pre-school to S3.
- As senior examinations are reviewed they will take account of the Experiences and Outcomes upon which exam courses must build
- The CfE prescribes a ‘broad general education’ for all up to the end of S3 progressing through the following stages: Early (up to the end P1); 1st (up to end P4); 2nd (up to end P7) 3rd and 4th (up to end S3 – 3rd for all 4th for some).
 - In theory there should be no ceilings put on particular areas – staff should be able to raise challenge and levels of performance according to what pupils are capable of.
 - The Levels are therefore fewer and broader than under 5-14 – less like hoops to jump through.
- An ‘experience’ is anything that a pupil does that “develops attributes and capabilities and that helps to achieve active engagement, motivation and depth of learning”.
- An ‘outcome’ is what is achieved, what they learn and what they show they can do – not only in timetabled classes, but everywhere.
- Because the CfE builds on Assessment for Learning, the experiences and outcomes are expressed in the language of a child explaining what he or she is able to do.
- The set of Experiences and Outcomes for each of the ‘curricular areas’ includes an outline of Principles and Practice (called the ‘cover paper’ in the draft version) – this outlines the structure and what is regarded as good practice in each curricular area, features of assessment and connections to other areas of the curriculum.

Every teacher in Scotland received a hard copy of the experiences and outcomes during May. This is supposed to be in a form that can be adapted to their own particular school, department and classes. The overall tone of the CfE is for each school, each department and each individual teacher to take professional responsibility for what is taught to the individual pupils ('learners') in their charge.

The Curriculum for Excellence and Hutchesons' Grammar School

The Curriculum for Excellence is an initiative for the whole of Scotland: as such it is a part of the general context in which we operate, but also, as such, it is not specifically designed to meet the needs of our pupils, but those whom the pre-existing curriculum has been failing. It is incumbent upon us as upon every educational institution in Scotland to operate with reference to our specific context. In this respect, by regularly evaluating our practice we have already been operating within the general context of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Some recent examples (by no means comprehensive):

- We have reviewed the S1 and S2 curriculum and made appropriate changes: cross-curricular Technology and Economics; a new RMPS course in S2; re-organising language teaching to increase the depth and confidence of pupils' understanding of learning a foreign language as a transferable skill, tied to changes in language teaching in the Primary
- We have reviewed the S5 timetable to improve provision for both the majority and the most able of our pupils, including an examination of various weekly timetable models
- We have been looking at ways of improving 'independent learning' eg IRP
- We have used cluster discussions within and between departments to provide a 'map' of what is taught in S1, S2, S3 and S4 and improve awareness of common areas
- Following a review of ICT in the primary the Computing Department produced a booklet for all departments outlining expectations of IT competence for S1 and S2.
- The Maths department has reviewed its S1 and S2 schemes of work following a survey of numeracy practice across departments.
- 'Shakespeare Day' introduced as a part of the transition of P7 to S1 delivered by English, Drama, Art and Music departments.
- Science events linking Secondary and Primary staff
- We have engaged in a process of developing a 'curriculum for Hutchesons' rationale, using the language (or jargon) specific to our school
- CPD across the school and within the departments has promoted formative assessment as well as discussion of other pedagogical issues referred to in the CfE
- We are engaged in efforts to improve challenge, inspiration and creativity in teaching and learning through the use of observation

In addition we have in our extensive extra-curricular provision and commitment to it, long embraced the concept that key experiences outside the classroom, in addition to and sometimes in combination with, the classroom experience, add greatly to the educational

experiences of pupils. While we are quite clear having reviewed our provision that our particular context makes subject specialism and teachers' academic expertise a central part of how we organise the academic curriculum and we have avoided much of the jargon of the CfE, we are aware of some of the benefits of improving connections across the curriculum horizontally and vertically. While 'cross-curricularism' has been seized upon as an idea identified with CfE, it is not synonymous with it. Rather the emphasis is upon teachers working together for the benefit of pupils (see Fiona Hyslop's words above). It is also clear that building effective connections across subject disciplines requires first expertise and confidence *within* subject disciplines.

By considering first and foremost our own curriculum in the light of the needs of our pupils and the school community without complacency we are acting in the spirit of the Curriculum for Excellence and making our contribution to the national target to improve young people's attainment across the four capacities. The HMle will expect that we continue to evaluate the activities we engage in as a part of teaching and learning and how we provide for each individual as well as the whole of the school community that we aim to serve. As teachers across Scotland have responded to the Experiences and Outcomes documentation for each subject area, so too will we. We should be confident that what we provide is in most or all areas at least as good as that laid out in the Experiences and Outcomes, but we should not take it for granted that it is so.

Summary

- The Curriculum for Excellence is a long term effort to change the culture of education in Scotland not a one off reform of the content of the curriculum
- The CfE has been praised for its implicit regard for teachers' professionalism and encouragement of creativity, flexibility and innovation that can better motivate pupils and for its recognition of the value of the 'extra-curricular'
- It has been criticised as vague, well meaning, but woolly in language, concept and direction
- While our regular reviews of the curriculum and of our practice as teachers are dictated by our fairly unique and particular priorities, they often reflect the concerns that underpin the CfE (and other curricular reforms around the world)
- For us the experiences and outcomes should be examined in relation to current schemes of work and in the expectation that future reforms to senior examinations will over time be made with reference to them.

Colin Bagnall, May 2009