

quick guide

effective practice

Curriculum design, development and change at Key Stage 4

By Ian Duckett and Gillian Frankland

The curriculum for 14 – 16 year olds continues to be the subject of debate and change, mainly as a result of government-inspired initiatives designed to help all students achieve to their full potential. Whatever the nature of a particular initiative, it is the responsibility of individual schools and colleges to implement it effectively within the overall Key Stage 4 curriculum.

This leaflet is a brief guide to the key issues to consider when embarking on an initiative that involves curriculum designs, development and change at Key Stage 4. It provides advice on:

- Starting out
- Making curriculum change a high priority
- Planning and resources
- Curriculum audit
- Supporting staff to achieve success
- Further information

Starting out

Each school and college will start on the process of curriculum development from a different point and will want to 'weigh' the advantages and disadvantages of a new initiative in the light of a number of factors. These will include:

- The ethos of the school or college: how is the initiative judged to fit with the values and culture of the institution, its staff and students and the wider community it serves?
- The strength of the rationale for adopting an initiative: are there compelling educational or financial reasons to get involved?
- Whether there is an enhanced curriculum offer: are there obvious added value benefits for current and future students over and above the current curriculum offer? Will the initiative enhance students' post-16 progression opportunities?
- The impact on staff: what will be the likely reaction from those involved? Does the expertise exist to make a success of it? Are staff already overstretched with other, more valuable initiatives?
- The support of parents: If it means offering unfamiliar courses or reduced options to students, will parents be supportive or will there be an uphill struggle to recruit?
- The curriculum available in the locality: are local schools and colleges also taking on the initiative and does this affect the decision? Are there opportunities to collaborate to maximise the benefits to students and share the development costs? Are there implications arising from the role and policies of the local Learning & Skills Council (LSC)?

Curriculum audit

Before embarking on a process of curriculum development and change, most centres carry out some form of curriculum audit. This means asking key questions about the current curriculum and its strengths and weaknesses. An audit helps to target areas for development or decide whether to embrace an externally-driven initiative. Key questions will include:

- What does entitlement curriculum mean for us at Key Stage 4? Will it result in a broader and more meaningful curriculum and a well-balanced programme for all learners?
- Do we offer a sufficiently broad range of subjects that appeal to and motivate all our students? If not, what gaps are there in our provision?
- What degree of choice do we want to be able to offer?
- What skills do we want all our students to develop? Are these developed adequately through the current curriculum and subjects available?
- In what subjects and contexts are these skills likely to be best developed?
- Should work-related courses be offered as options or form part of an entitlement?
- What are the views of governors and parents? How and when should we involve them in the process of change?
- Does the curriculum reflect the needs of the community served by the school in terms of the local employment opportunities, training or courses available post-16?
- What impact would the introduction of work-related courses have on the structure of the curriculum?
- What impact will a new initiative have on the timetable model currently in place?
- Do we want to offer separate work-related courses or should we look to enrich other subjects with vocational aspects?
- Can we co-operate with other local institutions in order to broaden the curriculum offered to students?

- What are the views of staff and what impact will any change have on them? Do we currently have the expertise needed to implement new provision effectively? Are there implications for our department or faculty structures?
- If new courses are introduced, what implications will there be for accommodation, equipment and other facilities?
- What additional resources will be needed? Will meeting these needs mean reductions for other areas and how will that be managed?

Making curriculum change a high priority

To make curriculum change happen, it must be given a high priority by the senior management in a school or college. The senior management team (SMT) must be committed to an initiative and demonstrate that commitment to staff. This can be demonstrated by:

- Appointing a member of the SMT to take responsibility for an initiative
- Providing a clear picture of how the initiative will affect teachers, students and the school as a whole
- Ensuring that Governors are involved in decisions about curriculum innovations: if they feel a sense of commitment, they are far more likely to provide the support needed for success; consider asking one Governor to be actively involved in overseeing the initiative, to ensure it gets support at the highest level
- Making curriculum development issues a top priority for debate at SMT, to ensure that throughout the development, implementation and evaluation phases SMT members are kept informed of progress and can provide advice
- Ensuring that any changes to the curriculum are explicit in strategic, operation and development plans
- Tell parents and students about the initiative; explain the rationale, report progress as it develops and successes from implementation, all of which will help emphasise its importance and relevance

Supporting staff to achieve success

Teachers are far more likely to respond positively to initiatives if they are given additional support during the planning and development stages. The most valuable support the SMT can provide is giving staff time to plan and implement their job roles and responsibilities.

Other ways to provide support include:

- Providing a clear, positive vision of the initiative and the benefits it will bring to students
- Ensuring that an SMT member has a working knowledge and understanding of the demands of the new curriculum initiative
- Taking time to find out the strengths, talents, experience and abilities of staff members
- Consulting staff from the outset, to involve them and develop a sense of ownership and commitment to an initiative
- Providing training and INSET to meet the professional development needs of staff who are asked to get involved with implementing the initiative
- Involving staff and departments that are committed to change and innovation
- Explaining why staff are involved and what skills and experience they bring to the initiative
- Making sure a senior member of staff is visibly available to advise and lead teachers in their preparation
- Holding regular meetings to ensure all staff, not just those directly involved in teaching on or managing the initiative, are kept informed of developments
- Channeling resources to where they are most needed and ensure that the new initiative gets a fair deal in terms of budget
- Fostering an innovative culture in which all initiatives, whatever the origin, are considered positively as having potential benefits for the institution

Planning and resources

Curriculum change is most effective when it is well planned. This includes costing the process in terms of time and resources. Allocating a realistic amount of both to change management will help to ensure that the change is a success and will reinforce the SMT's commitment to the initiative. Key points to consider are:

- Be realistic about the time-scales involved and the resources needed to implement effective change; most successful change comes about when staff have had nine to twelve months to plan and prepare
- Establishing a budget that is dedicated to the initiative and cannot be used to fund other activities
- Take into account people's readiness and capacity for change; look for and use innovators and enthusiasts among the staff who will motivate others
- Set realistic deadlines and keep to them
- Ensure that the person responsible for timetabling understands the needs of the initiative and takes them into account
- Recognise any casualties of an initiative and plan how to handle them, by re-training or other development activities
- Make use of external sources of support and advice, much of which is available free of charge (e.g. from LSDA, awarding bodies, LEA networks, etc.)
- Cost the demands on resources realistically (such as the materials budgets of departments involved, specialist equipment, the accommodation needs) and ensure that the SMT are aware of the impact on budget
- Recognise the need for review and evaluation and provide staff with time for both; without this phase, important lessons may not be learnt and opportunities to share good practice lost

further information

There are many potential sources of information on curriculum development issues affecting schools and colleges. Contacting the LSDA and keeping a check on the websites below is likely to prove a useful starting point:

LSDA

Regent Arcade House
19-25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS

020 7297 9000

www.vocationallearning.org.uk

IFSP key contacts

Mark Ellis, Programme Leader	mellis@lsda.org.uk
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Sarah Lane, Development Adviser	slane@lsda.org.uk
Paddy Rowe, Development Adviser	prowe@lsda.org.uk

For general information

Nick Bloom, Senior Information Officer	020 7297 9140	nbloom@lsda.org.uk
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Useful websites

www.dfes.gov.uk

www.qca.org.uk

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

www.wjec.org.uk