

# Leadership for personalising learning

## Section One

### The components of personalised learning :

Learning how to learn

Assessment for learning

Teaching and learning strategies

Curriculum choice

Mentoring and support

## Learning how to learn

A central feature of any model of personalising learning is the focus on building the confidence and capacity of the individual learner – in a sense, empowering the learner. This is usually interpreted as:

- giving the learner a sense of their own efficacy and value as a learner
- developing personal skills and strategies to enable self-management and direction
- building a repertoire of learning strategies to offer a range of learning options
- developing skills for further study and employability

There are numerous formulations of the possible components of a learning to learn strategy. A generic model would include the following elements:

- self-management, organising time, workload and projects
- developing a sense of personal effectiveness as a learner, using learning styles, developing effective learning behaviours, developing resilience and concentration
- building confidence in literacy, oracy and numeracy
- learning how to research, organise and present data
- developing skills in analysing, explaining, justifying, demonstrating causality and developing a logical argument
- developing confidence in working with others, notably on a one-to-one basis and in small groups
- becoming meta-cognitive, learning to review and reflect and becoming reflexive as a learner

## Assessment for learning

In the context of personalising learning, assessment becomes formative and summative and is extended from assessment of learning to assessment as and for learning.

This implies:

- negotiation of learning outcomes, relevant assessment criteria and the means of assessment
- agreement of who will assess what and how
- linking assessment with feedback, mentoring and progression

Assessment for learning is about validating deep learning that means that it should be capable of demonstrating the extent to which:

- the topic has been personally understood
- there is evidence of active engagement with ideas and concepts
- links have been made to prior learning and implications for the future are explained
- evidence and information are presented in appropriate ways
- academic criteria are met in terms of organisation and presentation

The formative nature of assessment for learning implies the development of a wide portfolio of assessment strategies, for example:

- self-assessment
- peer assessment
- computer-based assessment
- internal teacher assessment
- external accredited assessment

Of course the fundamental purpose of assessment is related to pupil progress and the achievement of appropriate standards. The Making Good Progress pilot (DCSF 2007: 66) aims to create a situation where:

Teachers use their detailed knowledge of each pupil's progress to provide more accurate support, more differentiated teaching and more personal provision. For example, they adapt teaching plans, re-group pupils in class according to their understanding, provide additional time and support on difficult topics, offer options and specialisms, set more challenging tasks for those who need to be stretched and set personalised targets.

## Teaching and learning strategies

One of the most challenging aspects of personalising learning is the movement from the (stereotypical) generic approach to teaching to the facilitation of the learning of the individual. The issues in this context can be summarised as:

- What is to be learnt?
- How is it to be learnt?
- When is it to be learnt?
- Where is it to be learnt?
- Who is it to be learnt with?

The answers to these questions will determine the extent to which personalised learning is real or a token exercise.



Personalising learning is not about a mass movement to the right of this diagram; rather it is about informed choices as the most appropriate being given the topic, the developmental stage of the learner and the desired outcomes. Therefore, sometimes, whole class teaching is highly effective and appropriate; at other times individual activity is best. The role of the teacher is to negotiate and advise on the appropriate answers to the five questions above.

Given the implications of the emphasis on learning how we learn (see earlier), then quite irrespective of the structure of the learning experience there is also the issue of the nature of the learning process. To enhance the other elements of personalising learning, teaching and learning strategies will need to be:

- based in challenge, problem solving and research
- creative and innovative
- constructivist
- intrinsically motivating, ie perceived to be personally relevant and significant
- capable of differentiation
- open to multiple forms of assessment

## Curriculum choice

The choice of what is to be studied is fundamental to any model of personalising learning if its potential is to be realised and it is to move beyond a cosmetic exercise. This is not to imply an 'open-market' approach but rather guided opportunities, according to age and ability, to design personal learning pathways which are challenging, relevant and significant. In practice this might mean:

- a focus on themes and ideas rather than progression through information
- cross-curricular themes and integrated approaches to significant events;
- the 14–19 diplomas
- the development of personal pathways following specific gifts and talents and special needs
- accessing the curriculum in a variety of ways, in school, online, studying a specialist option and other schools and colleges, employers and universities
- learning through community engagement and through employment projects

The implications of this approach include:

- detailed and systematic diagnosis of each learner's wants and needs to negotiate a personal learning pathway
- developing programmes based on learning skills rather than content
- providing project-based approaches that focus on academic and social outcomes
- creating time to enable individual interests and projects to be followed

This all resonates with the QCA view:

*Developing a curriculum to meet student needs: Meeting the needs of individuals involves allowing them to work at a pace appropriate to their ability and circumstances. Thus different members of a teaching group could take varying amounts of time to achieve the agreed outcomes, rather than all of them completing the course in a predetermined period. They would progress in the manner that suited them best by:*

- *spending more time to acquire or consolidate learning*
- *studying an area in greater or lesser depth*
- *moving to a higher level of learning in the same or a related area*
- *moving on to a different, equally demanding, area of learning*
- *moving on to a different, more demanding, area of learning*
- *experiencing a different type of learning*
- *concentrating on personal development or experience. (QCA)*

**The choice of what is to be studied is fundamental to any model of personalised learning.**

## Mentoring and support

It is difficult to envisage how any model of personalising learning could work without being underpinned by mentoring and an entitlement to personal support. Mentoring is widely seen as the most effective way to support deep learning, to secure understanding and to bring about personal change. In this context mentoring is usually characterised as being:

- a long-term, one-to-one relationship
- based in high-level interpersonal skills
- focused on supporting the learner's personal effectiveness
- a blend of challenge and support

Mentoring has a number of specific functions in ensuring that personalised learning works:

- mentoring academic progress and development
- supporting learning to learn strategies and review and reflection to enhance learning effectiveness
- advising and guiding on curriculum choices and learning strategies
- reviewing well-being, attendance, engagement in learning

In a fully personalised learning environment mentoring may well be the dominant activity for teachers and other adults. However, it is important to stress the importance of peer mentoring – learners mentoring learners in terms of specific aspects of curriculum content and topics and in providing support at the critical phases of school life.

The Children's Plan makes a commitment to one-to-one support:

*From the moment they arrive in secondary school every child will have a personal tutor who knows them well in the round and as a main contact for parents. (DCSF 2007: 57)*

The work of these tutors will include:

- helping with induction
- agreeing learning targets term by term
- encouraging ambitions
- arranging additional support
- helping the child make choices
- maintaining contact with parents
- liaising with other professionals and agencies

**Mentoring is widely seen as the most effective way to support deep learning.**

For each of the five elements of personalising learning discussed previously, review the current state of your school's engagement.

Component	Score	Issues and implications
1. Learning to learn		
2. Assessment for learning		
3. Teaching and learning strategies		
4. Curriculum choice		
5. Mentoring and support		

Score each component:

- A** = Fully established, confident and consistent practice across the school.
- B** = Emergent practice across the school or established in parts of the school.
- C** = At the planning and development stage.
- D** = Not yet on the school's agenda.