Managing the curriculum
The school curriculum in context

Designing the future?

The majority of pupils in our schools today will not begin their working lives until 2020. What that world will be like is a matter of interesting conjecture, but not for school leaders. They are responsible for designing, developing and delivering the curriculum now that will equip their pupils with the skills and attributes they will need in the next decade.

The school curriculum is currently undergoing a period of significant change driven by overarching national policy imperatives, planned reforms to the national curriculum, and opportunities provided by reduced central direction over its design and delivery. This is an opportune moment for senior leaders, therefore, to raise their sights beyond the next two or three years and to engage in focused futures thinking whilst balancing this with the need to respond to current pressures for reform.

The school curriculum in England

Maintained schools

The curriculum provided to children in maintained schools has three elements:

- **The national curriculum** is prescribed by statute and consists of the core and foundation subjects.
- **The basic curriculum** describes the statutory requirements for curricular provision in addition to the national curriculum. These are compulsory requirements but schools are able to determine for themselves the specific nature of this provision (although maintained schools cannot determine the nature of religious education (RE) provision). The basic curriculum comprises requirements in current legislation for the teaching of RE throughout primary and secondary school, within the guidelines of the local Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE), sex education (Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4), careers education (Key Stage 4) and opportunities for work-related learning (Key Stage 4).
- **The local curriculum** is one that schools are currently free to adopt in order to complement the national and basic curriculums with other curricular elements that are determined at school or community level.

Academies

The specific curriculum requirements for academies (including free schools) are set out in their funding agreements. Generally, academies and free schools are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to include English, maths and science and to make provision for the teaching of religious education. Beyond this, they have the freedom to design a curriculum that meets their pupils’ needs, aspirations and interests.

The school curriculum in England

[Diagram showing the relationship between local, basic, and national curriculum]

*Source: Oates et al, 2011, p. 18*
Review of the national curriculum

The national curriculum is currently undergoing a substantial and wide-ranging review. The first stage of this process was the publication of ‘The framework for the national curriculum: A report by the expert panel for the review of the national curriculum’ (Oates et al, 2011).

This video clip shows some members of the panel and politicians explaining why they believe the national curriculum is in need of reform. It is an important video and will help to frame your understanding of the rationale behind the reforms senior leaders may have to implement.

Why do we need a new national curriculum?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=F64vjp2yH6Q&feature=relmfu

Aims and purpose of the school curriculum

When school leaders engage in curriculum design, what are they seek to achieve? The authors of the ‘Framework for the national curriculum’ (2011) identify three levels of aims schools must take account of when designing their curriculum.

Level 1 aims

Overall educational aspirations for school curriculums

These are expressed in very high-level terms:

The curriculum for a maintained school or maintained nursery school satisfies the requirements of this section if it is a balanced and broadly based curriculum which: (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and (b) prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life (Education Act 2002).

Level 2 aims

Specifying more particular purposes for schools and for their curriculums

The authors suggest that the school curriculum should develop pupils’ knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes to satisfy economic, cultural, social, personal and environmental goals.

Level 3 aims

Goals for the programmes of study of particular subjects

Finally, the authors suggest that programmes of study for all subjects should start with a statement outlining the specific purpose of study in that subject and the key capabilities to be developed.
There is a wealth of literature on how senior leaders should go about the business of assembling a curriculum for their school. This is often an area of fierce debate which encompasses professional discourse about the nature of knowledge and subjects, how best to meet the needs of individual pupils, theories of cognitive and neurological development, what constitutes a ‘broad and balanced’ education, as well as arguments drawn from personal values about the purpose of schooling.

These often find their expression in two different starting points for the process of curriculum design: one approach arguing that subjects should be the foundations or building blocks, and the other focusing on competences.

To deepen your understanding of the debate in this area, read the first two texts in the list and select from some of the others. You may wish to select according to the phase and type of school you work in. You should also visit the Department for Education ‘Review of the national curriculum’ web pages for the most recent developments. Then complete the activity below.

**Resources available online:**


References

Young, M F D, 2008, *Bringing knowledge back in: From social constructivism to social realism in the sociology of education*


Thomas, L, 2012, *Re-thinking the importance of teaching: Curriculum and collaboration in an era of localism*

**Wording: Activity**

Critically reflect on and evaluate the ideas offered in the texts referenced above in relation to the following questions:

**Reflections: questions and activities**

− What processes are used to determine the aims of your school or academy’s curriculum? Compare your school’s approach to approaches in other schools or academies.

− How can senior leaders engage middle leaders in decisions about the future shape of the curriculum?

− What principles and professional knowledge do you draw on to inform your decisions about the curriculum in your school or academy?

− What are the merits of building the curriculum on a subject basis? And what are the merits of a skills or competency basis? Which do you prefer? What evidence supports your choice?

− Whole-school curriculum innovation may lead to a change in the balance of time allocated to subject areas and key stages, resulting in ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. What challenges does this bring to senior leaders?

− What do you regard as the biggest challenge for senior leaders in implementing the proposed reforms to the national curriculum? Are these challenges different for primary, special and secondary colleagues?
The curriculum lifecycle

This topic provides an overview of the role senior leaders play in the leadership and management of the school curriculum and considers its three dimensions: innovation, design and delivery.

Some writers in this field refer to ‘curriculum innovation’, and others to ‘curriculum development’ and whilst there are nuanced differences between the terms we will use them interchangeably to refer to the process of introducing and developing new curriculums.

In practice, senior leaders with curriculum responsibilities may find themselves engaged at a number of levels:

- leading whole-school processes such as a review of the curriculum in the light of changes to the national curriculum, perhaps focusing on the building blocks of the school curriculum
- working with middle leaders as they implement changes within their responsibility areas, perhaps focusing on how best to meet the goals in their subject’s programme of study

The approach taken here is to identify the processes and systems that should be in place for managing the curriculum either at a whole-school level or for individual areas of the curriculum.

We focus on the processes senior leaders need in order to lead and manage during the curriculum lifecycle and make a distinction between the design and delivery phases.

The curriculum lifecycle

Providing pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to their individual needs is an exciting and professionally rewarding activity. It requires a successful amalgam of high-order leadership and management skills:

Since the curriculum lies at the heart of the core purpose of education, successful curriculum innovation requires the use of high levels of skill in all of the key areas of leadership including strategy development and implementation, human resource management, teaching and learning, financial management, accountability, and liaison with key stakeholders and the community.

Brundrett & Duncan, 2010:4

The curriculum lifecycle model opposite offers an overview of the various activities and processes senior leaders engage in when leading and managing the curriculum.
Diagram: The curriculum lifecycle

Source: JISC, 2009, p. 3 (adapted)
The curriculum lifecycle

Content headings

- Initiate or review
- Develop or redevelop
- Resource
- Implement
- Support
- Assess
- Evaluate
- Evidence

Initiate or review

Effective senior leaders constantly look both outwards and inwards to ensure their curriculum meets the broad aims set by national policy-makers and that it matches the individual needs of their pupils. When they identify a need for change they take the lead in initiating the design process.

The stimulus for curriculum innovation or redesign may be external forces (e.g., teaching reading using phonics, or introducing the English baccalaureate) or the outcomes of internal reviews (e.g., surveys of pupil attitudes to the curriculum), or from encountering challenging thinking about the purpose or processes of education.

To read more about English baccalaureate, please visit DfE website: www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/englishbac/a0075975/the-english-baccalaureate

There is rarely a simple relationship between forces for change. The initial challenge to the school may come from external research. A good example is research commissioned by the Sutton Trust (Higgins, Kokotsaki & Coe, 2011) into the effectiveness of a range of improvement strategies. Its results were surprising, and challenged the effectiveness of a number of strategies commonly used in schools. It has caused a number of schools to embark on a process of self-evaluation to review aspects of their curriculum design.

The impetus for change might equally be an outcome of the school’s self-evaluation processes. For example, school may discover that its curriculum design is failing to engage boys and as a result senior leaders may decide to investigate the latest research to inform a review of curriculum design. Bringing the latest research evidence into school, and going out and seeking it when it is required, are key distinguishing features of the senior leader’s role.

At times, senior leaders may take the lead in proposing curriculum innovation at either a subject- or whole-school level. They must be able to support their proposals by presenting cogent arguments to the senior leadership team (SLT) and/or governing body. On other occasions, they will lead from behind, prompting middle leaders to take initiatives and supporting their endeavours.
Develop or redevelop

Once approval for an innovation has been agreed, the detailed development process begins. This is the heart of curriculum design and involves consideration of:

- aims
- programmes of study
- attainment targets and learning outcomes
- teaching and learning methods
- assessment methods

Resource

As the new curriculum design starts to take shape, the resource implications will gradually come into focus and bring with them considerations of:

- teacher availability Do we have enough staff?
- teacher competence Do the staff have the necessary skills?
- teacher development What continuing professional development (CPD) needs are there?
- rooms Are they the right size and shape? Do they have appropriate fittings?
- technology What demands will the new curriculum make on existing resources?
- operating costs What consumables are needed? What are the transport costs if provision is delivered off site?
- time What proportion of the available time will this development require?

Implement

This is the stage at which the curriculum is delivered. Senior leaders will pay particular attention to the match between the aims specified at the design stage and the actual experience of pupils. In practice this may involve fine-tuning materials, the allocation of additional resources or leading staff through the change process. The implementation phase may involve simply ‘being around’ and showing an interest in what is actually happening in classrooms.

Support

The support individual pupils require as they engage with the curriculum will vary according to the needs of the individual learner, the particular demands of individual subjects and the culture of the school. Ensuring pupils are effectively supported during the delivery phase will involve considerations of:

- availability and deployment of teaching assistants
- availability and deployment of mentors
- opportunities afforded by the school/academy’s virtual learning environment (VLE)
- library resources
- parental/carers’ understanding of the curriculum and its pedagogy
Assess

Whilst the assessment model will have been determined at the design stage, implementing the model will involve considerations of:

− systems and processes for providing formative feedback (assessment for learning or AfL)
− systems and processes for recording the outcomes of assessments
− scheduling of formal assessments within the school calendar
− special requirements, eg use of specific facilities, use of video to record activities
− effective use of technology to support assessment processes
− how the outcomes of assessment activities will feed into curriculum review processes

Evaluate

Senior leaders should constantly evaluate the design of the curriculum. Evidence of the extent to which the curriculum actually meets pupils’ needs and delivers its stated aims may be gained from a number of sources:

− feedback from teachers
− feedback from pupils
− feedback from parents/carers
− lesson observations
− work scrutinies
− external monitoring (Ofsted, local authority)
− collaborative review with partner schools or academies
− outcomes of assessment

Evidence

A key distinguishing characteristic of professionals is that they draw from a body of knowledge about effective practice in their profession. As leading professionals in their organisations, senior leaders should develop the habit of drawing on educational research to underpin their decisions on curriculum design. This might include using evidence of the:

− impact of specific innovations (what has worked and what has not) to inform the design phase
− benefits and drawbacks of initiatives such as AfL to inform decisions about assessment strategies
− effective deployment of classroom assistants to influence the choice of delivery model
The curriculum: definitions

Before progressing to the detail of design and delivery, it is useful to explore our understanding of ‘the curriculum’. At its simplest, the term ‘curriculum’ is used to describe a plan or design on which educational provision is based.

> Education can thus be seen, at its simplest, as the product of interaction between socially valued knowledge and individual development. It occurs through learner experience of both of these key elements. The school curriculum structures these processes.
> Oates et al, 2011:11

Some professionals take a broader view and extend the definition to include:

> ... everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned
> QCA, 2000:3

This has led some commentators to refer to the ‘hidden curriculum’, a term first used by Jackson (1968). He argues that what is taught in schools is more than just the formal curriculum and that school should be understood as a socialisation process where pupils pick up messages through the experience of being in school, not just from things that they are taught in lessons. The hidden curriculum includes learning from other pupils, but may also include learning that arises from a juxtaposition of the school’s espoused values and its practice. An example would be a school that promotes active citizenship in personal, health and social education (PHSE) lessons, but has no structures in place for the expression of pupil’s views.

The curriculum: approaches

Pring and Pollard (2011, p.32) offer an alternative view, suggesting that ‘curriculum in two different senses, each reflecting a different understanding of learning and the role of the teacher in promoting it’.

Thus one approach is to see the curriculum as prescribing what is to be taught, attainment targets and methodologies to be used. Under this model, the teacher’s role is to deliver the curriculum. The other approach is to see the curriculum as specifying entitlement. Under this model, the teacher’s role is to exercise professional judgement about the best way to provide this:

> Within that framework, teachers should be curriculum creators, not curriculum deliverers (ibid, p.32).

Pring and Pollard (2011) are dissatisfied with current practice in England and formulate two propositions:

- **Challenge**: The school curriculum has become overloaded and dysfunctional, and fails to meet the needs of many young people.

- **Principle**: A curriculum entitlement framework should be designed to introduce young people to subjects and the broad domains of knowledge, to practical capabilities and skills, to a sense of achievement, to the ‘big issues’ that confront society and to the knowledge and dispositions for active citizenship, yet be flexible enough for teachers to adapt appropriately.

The principle espoused by Pring and Pollard is another facet of the debate over autonomy versus central decision-making that runs through much of current educational policy-making. As the new national curriculum takes shape, we can see both tendencies, such as a reduction in the amount of central prescription accompanied by some non-negotiables such as the teaching of phonics at key stages 1 and 2.
Activity

Read chapter 6 of Pring and Pollard (2011) and access Revell’s (2004) article on the hidden curriculum. Use them and the prompts below to reflect on your personal understanding of ‘the curriculum’.

1. If you were asked to explain your school’s curriculum to a parent, how would you describe it? How would you describe it to a teacher from another school?

2. How helpful is Pring and Pollard’s (2011) notion of the curriculum as ‘entitlement’ to senior leaders when they are reviewing or evaluating their school’s curriculum design?

3. Can you identify features of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in your school? What is its impact upon the formal curriculum? Compare your analysis with some of your colleagues’ analyses. What conclusions can you draw?

4. Does your school have a curriculum statement or similar document? Who is the intended audience? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this document?

Initiating curriculum change

We now consider in more detail the curriculum lifecycle model introduced earlier and turn our attention to the process of curriculum innovation or development within individual schools and academies. The reshaped national curriculum and/or the freedoms provided by academy status will provide senior leaders with many potentially exciting opportunities for reviewing their school’s curriculum and re-evaluating how they provide a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’.

Initiation phase

At the whole-school level, curriculum development will not be a spasmodic activity, but like many other areas of school leadership will be a planned, ongoing process. Senior leaders should regularly assess the need for curriculum development by engaging in some or all the four key activities illustrated opposite.

Diagram: Factors influencing the initiation phase of curriculum change

Analysis of practice

Curriculum innovation in practice is an exciting and energising process. In these two case studies from the Ofsted good practice series, heads of a primary and secondary school respectively describe the journey of an innovation in their school. Read one of the case studies and then read ‘Curriculum innovation in schools’ (Ofsted, 2008), which will provide you with an overview of the attributes of successful curriculum innovation in schools.


Questions

1. What were the drivers for change in the case study you chose? From what you have read, how much of the drive was provided by the context (ie, the need for change) and how much by the dynamism of the individuals concerned?

2. What, in your opinion, is innovative about the new curriculum design the school adopted?

3. What key processes can you identify that have ensured that the innovation has been successfully embedded and nurtured? What learning can you take from this?

Initiation phase activities

- Horizon-scanning
- Stakeholder analysis
- Pedagogical review
- Review of the current curriculum

Horizon-scanning

Horizon-scanning is an intelligence-gathering process that requires a range of skills:

- **engaging in futures thinking** What will the world our pupils are going to inhabit look like? What skills, knowledge and understanding will they need?

- **reviewing recent national policy reforms or initiatives** Are we compliant? What opportunities do they provide?

- **analysing significant reports into specific areas** How will the Tickell review of early years provision or the Wolf review of vocational education affect us?

Stakeholder analysis

Whilst central direction over the curriculum may be diminishing, both maintained schools and academies must increasingly engage local stakeholders in their overall curriculum planning, a further example of increased autonomy accompanied by increased local accountability. Each school and academy will have its own unique set of stakeholder groups which may include:

- pupils
- parents/carers
- faith organisations
- linked schools or academies, eg feeder high schools being consulted by primaries and vice-versa; secondary schools consulting local sixth from colleges or further education colleges
- community organisations, chambers of commerce and so on

Managing stakeholder relationships during these processes requires senior leaders to display a range of skills: good communication, political awareness and sensitivity.
Pedagogical review

The pedagogical review will involve a review of current theories of learning and child development, consideration of specific theories, for example neuro-linguistic programming, multiple intelligences, learning styles, the teaching of reading, and the potential offered by emerging technologies to reshape the nature of the learning process.

For senior leaders, this means that they must keep themselves informed about the latest research and developments so that they are able to stimulate debate and coach other colleagues in new methodologies.

Review of the current curriculum

The outcomes from the first three processes will inform any reviews of the existing curriculum and may lead senior leaders to engage in some or all of the following:

- a curriculum mapping exercise to determine how well the existing curriculum matches the revised national curriculum requirements, using consideration of the recommendations of relevant government reports, the skills and knowledge needed to work in the local economy, and the outcomes of academic research
- analysis of feedback on the effectiveness of the current curriculum gained through the school’s self-evaluation systems and processes
- responses to external feedback from Ofsted, local authority monitoring, or external advisers
- debate and discussion among middle leaders and senior colleagues about the shape of the curriculum or pedagogy

The development phase

The development stage is at the heart of the design process, and senior leaders play a critical role in ensuring that this is rigorous and involves and engages all staff who will be involved in the eventual delivery.

Historically, we can distinguish two distinct approaches to curriculum design: product models and process models. As with many models, they present a polarised and simplified representation of complex phenomena; nevertheless they are instructive. The two models differ in their initial starting points, their approach to learning and their interpretation of how children best acquire knowledge, skills and understanding.

The choice of approach is significant because it will:

- influence the specification of learning outcomes
- define the nature of children’s learning experiences
- lead to particular modes of assessment
- determine eventual pupil achievements

In practice, both models will often allow for elements of the other, but one may dominate.

Senior leaders need to be both secure in their personal understanding of the merits of each approach and able to lead middle leaders in professional dialogue about the issues that may arise.
Overview of the curriculum design process

The model opposite illustrates the key processes senior leaders typically engage in when designing a new curriculum. The model describes a linear, sequential process, but in practice the process is likely to be far more organic and senior leaders will find themselves visiting and revisiting each stage as the various elements are constructed.
Exploring the curriculum design process

Agreeing aims

Earlier we discussed three levels of nationally determined aims that leaders must take into account according to the status of their organisation.

Senior leaders will almost certainly wish to incorporate additional aims to reflect the particular needs of their pupils and the aspirations of local stakeholder groups, and should systematically engage with them in the process of agreeing locally determined aims.

Devising schemes of work

Schemes of work should be informed, in the first instance, by relevant nationally determined programmes of study that prescribe the subject content to be included. National programmes of study are not schemes of work and an important task for senior leaders is to guide colleagues on how to devise schemes of work that flesh out the requirements of programmes of study and supplement these with additional content the school believes to be desirable. Schemes of work may be very prescriptive or may provide a loose framework within which individual teachers make their own judgements on the best way to deliver what is expected.

Specifying learning outcomes

Learning outcomes provide the link between what is to be learned and what is to be assessed. They may be in the form of national attainment targets, which specify standards to be achieved, but they will also include other outcomes for which there are no national attainment targets.

Poor specification can lead to the production of learning outcomes that are difficult to assess, a criticism that was levelled at the learning outcomes specified in the various iterations of the national curriculum up to 2012. In their review of the national curriculum, Oates et al (2011) argue that establishing meaningful learning outcomes requires a ‘curriculum-focused assessment’ approach, which ties together more closely what is to be learned and what is to be assessed; a view endorsed by the secretary of state for education:

> We will…. describe subject content in a way which makes clear both what should be taught and what pupils should know and be able to do as a result.
> 
> Gove, 2012

Determining teaching and learning methods

Decisions on teaching and learning methodologies may be nationally determined (eg, teaching reading in primaries) or for schools to determine themselves (eg, ICT). The senior teacher’s role is to ensure that staff he or she leads and manages understand the school’s approach, and to facilitate their professional development where necessary. (The module Improving the quality of teaching has extensive material on this subject.)

Choosing an assessment strategy

> The way in which the achievement of pupils is assessed and reported has a profound impact on the operation of an education system, with implications for pupil motivation, the priorities of teachers and schools, and the kind of information that is available to stakeholders.

> Oates et al, 2011:44

When deciding which approach they should take to the assessment of a particular area of the curriculum, senior leaders will wish to consider the weight given to formative and summative approaches.
Formative approaches

During the last decade, the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL) – that learners learn best when they get feedback that is relatively immediate, specific and actionable – were adopted by many schools. There is evidence of the benefits of AfL but its impact may not be as great as some of its supporters claim (see Higgins, Kokotsaki & Coe, 2011).

Summative approaches

The planned reforms to the national curriculum may lead to a greater emphasis on summative assessment – testing pupils to establish what they know and can do as this letter to the review panel from the secretary of state illustrates:

There needs to be a relentless focus on ensuring that all pupils grasp key curriculum content.
The removal of level descriptors and the emphasis in the new Programmes of Study on what pupils should know and be able to do will help to ensure that schools concentrate on making sure that all pupils reach the expected standard, rather than on labelling differential performance.

Gove, 2012

In practice, the assessment model chosen will probably include elements of both but the relative emphasis given to one or the other may have a significant impact on the approach taken by teachers to teaching and learning. At its simplest, a strong emphasis on summative assessment may lead, its opponents argue, to teachers ‘teaching to the test’, whilst undue emphasis on formative assessment may lead, its critics suggest, to reduced expectations of what pupils are expected to achieve.

When choosing particular assessment tools or instruments, senior leaders will also wish to establish that the tools are fit for purpose and meet the two fundamental criteria normally used to evaluate the merits of particular assessment tools:

− **reliability:** the degree to which an assessment tool produces consistent and stable results
− **validity:** how well a test measures what it is purported to measure

Practical task

This task involves an analysis of the curriculum lifecycle and is central to your understanding of this topic. It may be completed over a period of several months.

Choose a curriculum development that you are either currently leading or will be undertaking in the near future. This might for example be provision for the teaching of phonics at Key Stage 2, reshaping the delivery of ICT, or responding to the green paper on special educational needs and/or disabilities. What is important is that it is an initiative you are engaged with and that you really care about.
For this activity you will reflect on each of the elements of the curriculum lifecycle using the model we have been considering. The questions below will guide you through the process.

1. **Initiation**: Reflect on the genesis of the initiative. It is unlikely to have been a one-off event but the outcome of a number of processes. Describe the role each of the following played in determining the need for change: horizon-scanning, stakeholder analysis, pedagogical review and review of the current curriculum. Which of these was (were) the most powerful driver(s)? Why was this? On reflection, how effective were the processes used at this stage of the process?

2. **Research evidence**: An Ofsted (2008, p.5) survey of successful innovation concluded that:
   
   *the most successful schools based their reforms on considerable background research into theories of learning and different ways of approaching the curriculum.*
   
   What research did you carry out into theories of learning or effective practice in other schools? How did you use the outcomes from this research? What impact did it have on the eventual outcome of the innovation?

3. **Design**:
   
   **Aims**: Refer to the three levels of aims we identified earlier. How does this innovation contribute to each of these three levels of aims? What process did you use to determine the local aims?
   
   **Building blocks**: Refer to the process and product models above. Which model best fits the approach you took? What do you think are the strengths of your approach? What were its limitations?
   
   **Schemes of work**: What approach did you take to the organisation and content of schemes of work? Who was involved in this process? What has been the feedback from teachers who have had to implement the schemes of work? What might you do differently next time?
   
   **Teaching and learning**: What level of specification did you make with regard to teaching methods and style? Why was this? Do you think you provided too much/too little direction? How do you know this?

4. **Assessment**: Read the following quote from Oates et al (2011):
   
   *In plain language, all assessment and other processes should bring people back to the content of the curriculum (and the extent to which it has been taught and learned), instead of focusing on abstracted and arbitrary expressions of the curriculum such as ‘levels’. We believe that it is vital for all assessment, up to the point of public examinations, to be focused on which specific elements of the curriculum an individual has deeply understood and which they have not.*

   *Oates et al, 2011:50*

   To what extent does the assessment model you have adopted fit with these recommendations (which were broadly accepted by the secretary of state)? You may find it useful to read chapter 8 of Oates et al (2011) to deepen your understanding of the issues involved.

5. **Assessment tools**: How do you know that the assessment tools you use are reliable and valid? What has been your approach to assessment for learning? What challenges has this brought?

The second part of this task is at the end of the next topic, Delivering the curriculum.
Delivering the curriculum

Resourcing curriculum innovation

Once a high-level design has been determined, senior leaders will turn their attention to the resource implications. In practice this may be a good opportunity to revisit and challenge existing assumptions about how best to deliver and resource the curriculum, and to test new models against value-for-money principles.

The diagram opposite illustrates the major costs associated with delivering the curriculum in a school or academy.

The senior leader’s role is to provide a strategic analysis of the:

- **capacity** to deliver the proposed innovation (Do we have the right staff skills? Does the school have appropriate accommodation? Do we have the technological infrastructure?)
- **sustainability** of the innovation over the long term (Have we allowed for additional costs that may arise in future years? What are the long-term projections for the school’s income? Will it be sufficient to support the innovation?)
- **professional development needs** of the staff who will deliver the innovation and the resource, in terms of time and money that will need to be allocated for these activities

If the school has a school business manager (SBM), this person should work with the senior leader at this stage to provide costings, identify hidden costs, advise on securing value for money and provide challenge.

Diagram: Resourcing the curriculum
Exploring resourcing issues

Teaching staff

Staffing will most often be the primary consideration of the curriculum planner. For example, what would be the impact of making modern foreign languages a compulsory requirement at Key Stage 2, or the introduction of single sciences at Key Stage 4?

For major whole-school developments such as a revision of the national curriculum that alters the balance of subjects to be taught, a first step for senior leaders may be to conduct a skills audit of their current staff and ask:

- What skills and subject knowledge will we need to deliver this new curriculum?
- What knowledge, skills and expertise do our current staff possess?

If the audit indicates a mismatch between the skills of the current staff and the requirements of the new model, a strategy for closing the gap will need to be developed. This might include some or all of the following:

- professional development of existing staff
- recruitment of new staff
- release of existing staff
- partnership arrangements to share staff on a temporary or permanent basis
- outsourcing delivery

This will also be an opportunity to review:

- the whole-school pupil teacher ratio (PTR) and how this is arrived at, possibly by benchmarking the school against other similar schools (while avoiding simply comparing numbers; benchmarking data is a springboard for exploration and discussion)
- class sizes, drawing on evidence from research, both internal and external, of the effects on pupil achievement of different class sizes
- setting and grouping arrangements to determine whether these provide value for money with regard to educational outcomes

Spend on educational support staff 2002/3 to 2009/10

Source: Audit Commission (2011, p.6)
Classroom support staff

Spending on educational support staff grew significantly in the majority of schools during the last decade. The development of a new curriculum model should give rise to similar questions about the nature, size and deployment of support staff as those for teachers. What demands does the new curriculum make on pupils? Will particular groups of pupils need more (or less) support? Does your school have the right skills among the existing support staff team? What configuration of pupils, teachers and support staff will provide the best educational value for money?

Professional development

Diagram: Leadership capabilities

Robinson, 2011:16

The importance of school leaders focusing their energies on teacher development is a recurrent theme in international research into successful school improvement (Robinson, 2011). This is particularly the case when a new curriculum involves a significant shift in teaching methodology or the use of unfamiliar technologies which may result in staff temporarily feeling de-skilled. Brundrett and Duncan (2011) observe that:

Throughout the process of curriculum innovation effective leaders ensure that struggling staff are supported sensitively. Guidance and support is more effective when it is not ad hoc but structured into programmes of training and development. In the larger schools, support for newly qualified and less experienced teachers was part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders.

Brundrett & Duncan, 2011:50

The amount of resource required for effective professional development, particularly if it includes joint practice development with other organisations, can be large and needs to be accounted for by senior leaders from the outset.
Learning resources

The cost of learning resources such as text books, specialist equipment and so on needs to be established well in advance of the implementation of a new curriculum model. The use of ICT and digital technologies is a special case because of the level of expenditure involved.

The potential of digital technologies to open up new, exciting and more engaging ways of delivering the school curriculum is immense and it is inconceivable that any significant curriculum change will not involve deliberations about how best to use the available technologies, as well as discussion of what the school can afford. Whilst senior leaders will try to future proof their purchases, this is a far from exact science and is an area in which they may wish to seek external expert advice. In the case of leasing arrangements it is essential that they seek expert guidance.

General running costs and other support staff costs

Whilst the impact of some initiatives will be resource neutral, others may not be. Obvious examples are a switch to new forms of technology which might add to the cost of technical support staff; changes in the balance between subjects (for example more time allocated to PE may result in an increase in cleaning costs), or a new method of assessment may increase demands on administrative staff time.

Some of these costs may be hidden in the first instance but they are less likely to remain hidden if both teaching and support staff affected by a curriculum innovation are engaged during the design stage.

Scheduling the curriculum

Organising the delivery of the curriculum is often the responsibility of a senior leader and requires them to produce the most effective and efficient configuration of:

- staff
- pupils
- space
- time

In practice this means producing a timetable which may be of increasing complexity according to the size and nature of the organisation. The mechanics of school timetabling are less important than the school’s approach to timetabling. The timetable should be viewed as an enabling device to allow the school to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for its pupils.

Constructing a timetable, particularly during a time of significant curriculum innovation, can give rise to critical decisions about the deployment of staff. Whilst this may prove more challenging in secondary schools because of the importance of subject specialisms, primary schools may also face challenges if specific skills are in short supply, for example for teaching a modern foreign language or PE. It is not uncommon for the staffing structure to become unbalanced as the skills of staff no longer match the needs of the new curriculum.

Such scenarios can lead to difficult choices about retraining and releasing staff. Whilst there may be a temptation to use staff to teach in areas for which they are not appropriately trained, this should be resisted if the education of children is not to suffer. Effective systems should be in place to ensure that potential surplus staffing is identified early in the planning cycle so that the HR issues involved are dealt with according to employment law and any relevant locally agreed policies.

The next topic investigates in greater detail the issues faced by senior leaders when constructing a school timetable.
Strategies for supporting the delivery of the curriculum

Barnes and Smith’s (2007, p.10) research provides some valuable insights into practical strategies senior leaders have used to manage the process of curriculum innovation at the delivery stage. They observe that:

*School leaders (or in the case of distributed leadership, other leaders in the school) supported those implementing the innovation directly.*

*Barnes and Smith, 2007:10

The types of support senior leaders offered included:

- providing relevant, up-to-date resources
- providing detailed schemes of work
- providing differentiated continuing professional development for some staff
- encouraging opportunities to carry out research linked to the developments
- providing opportunities for working group membership to encourage peer support
- pairing practitioners with an appropriate advocate who acts as a project champion, or a stronger or more experienced staff member with a weaker or less experienced colleague
- providing opportunities for ongoing, learning-centred reflection and dialogue
- linking innovation with performance management
- regular feedback meetings to discuss the progress of the innovation against desired outcomes
- clear messages of trust that empower those leading to take responsibility and ownership of developments; as one headteacher said, ‘Their contribution is to be expert leaders of learning rather than, say, historians... I trust them and don’t interfere’
- financing of professional development opportunities such as school visits or conference attendance to retain a cutting edge
- financing of strategies and resources that aid the innovation in taking a foothold, for example leading an academic consultancy
Practical task

This task is a continuation of the task you began in the previous topic when you chose a curriculum development that you are either currently leading or will be undertaking in the near future. Your focus for this activity is on the management of the delivery phase.

Organise a meeting with your SBM or the senior leader responsible for resource management and discuss the following questions:

1. **When** during the curriculum development process did you start to consider resourcing issues? What challenges did this present?
2. What was your analysis of the school’s **capacity** to deliver the innovation? Were any shortfalls identified? What were these and how did you overcome them?
3. How did you ensure the innovation was **sustainable** in the long term?
4. How did you decide on the level of resources to be allocated to **professional development** activities? On reflection, was this the right amount? How do you know?
5. How did you involve **support** staff during the implementation stage? What strategies did you use? How effective were they?
6. How do you plan to evaluate the impact of this innovation? What methods will you use? Why have you chosen these methods? What are their strengths and their limitations? What do you hope to find out?

Impact

The process of evaluating the curriculum logically occurs after it has been delivered, but senior leaders should determine their evaluation strategy and success criteria in advance of the delivery phase. Evaluation can be the weakest point of the curriculum lifecycle and senior leaders should ensure sufficient resources are allocated to it.

There are many potential areas of focus for evaluation. Here we identify three possible areas, each of which gives rise to questions of a different order.

- **Whole-school curriculum**: does it meet the individual needs of all our pupils?
- **Key stage**: does it meet the individual needs of all pupils? Does it prepare them for the next key stage?
- **Subject**: does it meet the individual needs of all pupils? Does it prepare them for the next level of study? Does it contribute effectively to cross-curricular themes?

All evaluation seeks to answer one fundamental question: what has been the impact of the curriculum we provide on our pupils’ achievements and attainment?
Evaluation strategy

The choice of evaluation strategy involves decisions about:

- **Feedback**: who should we involve?
- **Outcomes**: what should we measure?
- **Tools**: how will we measure it?

Increasingly, senior leaders have recognised that external evaluation adds strength and rigour to the process. For some this has been a logical product of co-construction processes with other schools involving activities such as senior leaders conducting paired evaluations across their schools or academies.

The resources below offer case study accounts of evaluation strategies and tools used by schools seeking to evaluate the impact of curriculum changes they had introduced.


Timetabling

**Key processes**

Constructing the school timetable will often be the responsibility of a senior teacher. This is a very challenging task and requires a range of skills:

- **curriculum design**: understanding what the school is seeking to achieve for each of its pupils and how the scheduling the curriculum can help to deliver those aims
- **technical**: how best to fit together the pieces of a complex jigsaw
- **creative**: the ability to re-engineer the timetable if the current model cannot facilitate the school’s curriculum plans
- **political**: understanding and managing the micro-political issues that may arise from the allocation of classes to teachers, time allocations to different subjects, allocation of space to different areas of the curriculum and so on
- **interpersonal**: communicating, negotiating, persuading and challenging staff

Viewed narrowly, timetabling can be seen as the process of scheduling teachers to classes and allocating them to rooms in preparation for the coming school year. A broader perspective sees timetabling as the process of implementing the school’s curriculum design and plans as illustrated in the model below. It also implies that the timetabler should play a significant role in the school’s curriculum design and planning processes. The diagram below illustrates the sequence of key timetabling-related decision-making processes during the academic year and their relationship to the curriculum design process.
Curriculum design

Autumn term

The process of determining the whole-school curriculum model and how it will be delivered:

Whole-curriculum model
- curriculum building blocks: subjects, themes
- national curriculum: how best to meet its requirements if a maintained school
- school (local) curriculum: the school’s curriculum model

Whole-school curriculum delivery model
- length of lessons
- number of periods in week
- number of days in timetable cycle (5, 6, 10 etc)

Curriculum planning

Spring term (early)

The process of matching the whole-school curriculum model with available resources:

- mapping the curriculum design to the available resources (Do we have enough maths teachers to deliver the curriculum? Do we have enough specialist rooms to meet the demand for art at Key Stage 4?)
- skills audit to determine staff shortages or surpluses; planning to meet shortages deal with surpluses
- costing the curriculum (What will it cost to deliver the curriculum? Will the school’s projected income fund the proposed curriculum?)

Timetabling

Summer term

The process of scheduling the delivery of the whole-school curriculum model
Constructing the timetable

A useful metaphor for the process of constructing the timetable is that of building a house. The first phase involves putting together the building blocks of the house to provide the shell. In the case of the school timetable, these are things such as the length of lessons, the balance of the school day between morning and afternoon and so on. The second phase is to decide how to configure the available resources, that is, scheduling teachers and rooms, to produce maximum efficiency and the optimum output.

Constructing the timetable 1: Building blocks

Length of lessons/periods per week

This is a fundamental issue and one that usually results in heated debate whenever a school decides to review it. It is doubtful that there is such a thing as an optimum length of lesson because of the different requirements of each subject, but in general, practical subjects often require longer lessons whereas subjects such as languages suit shorter lessons. Whilst many secondary schools have moved to 50- or 60-minute lessons, there is still a wide range of practice from 35-minute to 100-minute lessons.

Although there may not be an optimum unit of time, it is almost certainly the case that for each individual school, some lesson lengths will be more conducive to learning than others. In choosing their base unit of time, schools will want to consider the:

- nature of its pupils and their attitudes to learning (determined through observation and discussion)
- ease (or otherwise) of movement around the school and how much learning time is lost at changeover points
- flexibility offered by the base unit of time (eg, a base unit of 30 minutes allows, in theory, for lessons of 30 minutes, 60 minutes, 90 minutes or 120 minutes, although scheduling can be quite complex)
- age of the pupils (eg, balancing the needs of Year 7 pupils with those in Year 13)

The base unit of time is also important because of its impact on the total amount of teaching time allocated to each subject. Smaller base units potentially offer greater opportunity for making finer distinctions between subjects.

Flexible timeframes

Recognising that there may not be an optimum length of lesson, some schools use a range of techniques to provide more flexibility. Examples include:

- 6-day or 10-day timetables
- different lengths of lessons at different times of the day or on different days of the week
- floating periods, for example timetabling PHSE at a different time every week

Schools that adopt these structures will weigh the benefits of increased flexibility against the possible drawbacks of increased complexity.
Pupil grouping

Decisions on pupil grouping, such as whether to place children in ability bands or to teach them in mixed-ability or setted groups will be determined, in the first place, by the school’s approach to teaching and learning and the specific characteristics of its pupils. But they will also need to take account of the school’s ability to actually schedule particular arrangements: for example, if the school decides to have 10 sets of maths at the same time, does it have available 10 maths teachers, 10 maths rooms and 10 sets of resources?

Whilst there are opportunities to make alterations to pupil grouping arrangements, at the scheduling stage these will normally be limited. Once the timetabler has decided the school’s overall grouping strategy, it will be necessary to consider any implications for scheduling the timetable, and senior leaders will have a key role in pointing out the operational implications of decisions. In practice this may involve advising on the recruitment and release of staff; making recommendations about the use or allocation of rooms to subject areas, and providing additional funds for consumable resources. For these reasons, decisions of this nature should be taken in the autumn term, if not in the previous academic year, in order to allow sufficient lead-in time and for the school to reshape its allocation of resources.

Practical task

Debate about the optimum length of lesson often produces some strongly held views and this recent discussion in the Times Educational Supplement illustrates. Read some of the posts in this online discussion and then discuss the issues it raises with either your headteacher or your placement headteacher.

1. When was the last time the school/academy reviewed its base unit of time? Why did it choose its current model? What considerations influenced the decision?

2. What are the principle benefits of the current model and what are its major limitations?

http://community.tes.co.uk/forums/t/454954.aspx?PageIndex=1

Constructing the timetable 2: Scheduling

Scheduling the annual timetable is a complex activity. Most schools use specialist timetabling software which have the benefit of speeding up many processes, such as combing and the identification of potential clashes, and can provide the timetabler with alternative options when proposed arrangements cannot be scheduled. To be effective, the process will be iterative, engage a wide number of staff, and be based on agreed principles. Many schools have a clearly defined process for scheduling their timetable which roughly approximate to the one below:

- The curriculum model is determined in the light of national developments, individual pupil needs etc.
- Subject leaders allocate teachers to classes and rooms, indicating which allocations have greatest priority etc.
- A senior teacher schedules the timetable. Where conflicts occur and it isn’t possible to meet subject leaders’ requests, discussion and negotiation take place to determine solutions.
- An initial draft timetable is produced and subject leaders are invited to comment, eg on the distribution of lessons through the week.
- The final school timetable is produced and individual staff timetables are distributed.
Allocating teachers to classes

This is a key activity and can be the source of discord as many senior leaders will testify! It is useful, therefore, to draw up a school policy on the allocation of teachers to classes that covers the following:

- Who does this? Usually it is subject leaders.
- What process should the subject leader have undertaken before making their allocations? Should they hold a formal conversation with each member of their team?
- Are subject leaders expected to give each teacher a ‘balanced’ timetable, ie, a mix of ability groups or a mix of groups that present low and high challenges with regard to behaviour management? Or should they allocate groups according to previous teacher performance, eg teachers that have not proved effective in teaching higher ability GCSE classes should not be given these classes in the future?
- When subject leaders submit their allocations to the timetabler, are these recommendations which the school’s senior leadership may overturn?

Managing constraints

There may be constraints on the timetabling process as a result of the following:

- **The nature of the school site:** split-site arrangements tend to give rise to significant constraints because of the problems of staff or pupil movement. However, single-site schools that are widely dispersed may also be challenging.
- **Cluster arrangements:** typically these occur at Key Stage 4 and post-16 and involve joint timetabling arrangements, possibly across several institutions. This can build in rigidities because these arrangements often require half-day blocks of time which may impact negatively on the Key Stage 3 timetable arrangements.
- **Part-time teachers:** the availability of part-time teachers may impose restrictions; conversely part-time teachers may provide opportunities for greater flexibility. It is useful to have a clear policy on the arrangements for the deployment of part-time staff which is discussed with them at the time of their appointment (or change of status from full time to part time). The school must ensure that any policies conform with employment law.

Lesson distribution

How lessons are distributed across the day or week may affect pupils’ attitudes towards them and the quality of their learning. Some of the more obvious things timetablers seek to achieve include:

- a balance of subjects each day, and between mornings and afternoons, in order to provide pupils with a variety of learning experiences
- a balance across the week avoiding, for example, English lessons scheduled for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday only
- avoiding the same lessons occurring in the same time slot, for example mathematics always scheduled as the last lesson of the day for particular groups
- providing staff with an even distribution of their PPA time across the week
An iterative process

It is rarely possible to meet all the requests of subject leaders, and the production of school timetables almost inevitably involves trade-offs and compromises. Effective management of situations where the timetable ‘doesn’t fit’ will often depend more on the interpersonal skills of the timetabler rather than their technical abilities. Effective timetablers engage colleagues in the process of constructing the timetable by sharing constraints with them and providing them with options to consider.

The proposed changes to the national curriculum and the curriculum freedoms offered to schools with academy status are causing many school leaders to review and amend their current curriculum. Note down the major changes you would make to your school’s current curriculum if you became headteacher. Then consider how effectively the building blocks the school currently uses for its timetable would serve the changes you would like to introduce. If there are no significant changes, consider how effectively the building blocks serve the existing curriculum.

Use the questions below to prompt your thinking.

1. What changes would you make to the base unit of time and number of lessons per week to deliver the new curriculum? Discuss this question with a number of colleagues from different subject areas to gain a range of perspectives on how much time should be allocated to individual subjects, and what they consider to be the optimum length of a lesson.

2. What changes would you wish to make to the shape of the school day? Consider the number of lessons before and after lunch, the positioning of registration periods (ie, start or the end of the day), blocking arrangements with other institutions, and start and finish times.

3. What changes would you seek to make to pupil grouping arrangements? For example, would you wish to have a different banding arrangement? Would you prefer mixed-ability or setted arrangements? Discuss your suggestions with your school’s timetabler to identify any constraints (eg staff or room capacity) and note down how you might overcome them.

Summary

The management challenge

This topic has outlined the different roles and responsibilities senior leaders play in the design, development and delivery of the curriculum. The unit positions senior leaders on the boundary of their organisations – looking outwards and scanning the horizon to determine which developments beyond the school will have a significant impact on the shape of their curriculum; looking inwards to determine how they can engage, support and encourage middle leaders in curriculum planning processes.

*Innovation won’t occur without school leaders enabling and protecting. They must find the balance between holding on and letting go.*

This quote from a delegate to a National College conference in 2006 encapsulates the role senior leaders should play in the management of the curriculum. Senior leaders are in a position to enable and to make things happen; they are also in a position to protect innovation and risk-taking by ensuring they are adequately resourced, staff are given time for development activities, and by regularly communicating the vision for the innovation. At the same time they have to show confidence in the ability of the leaders they have grown to fly.
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