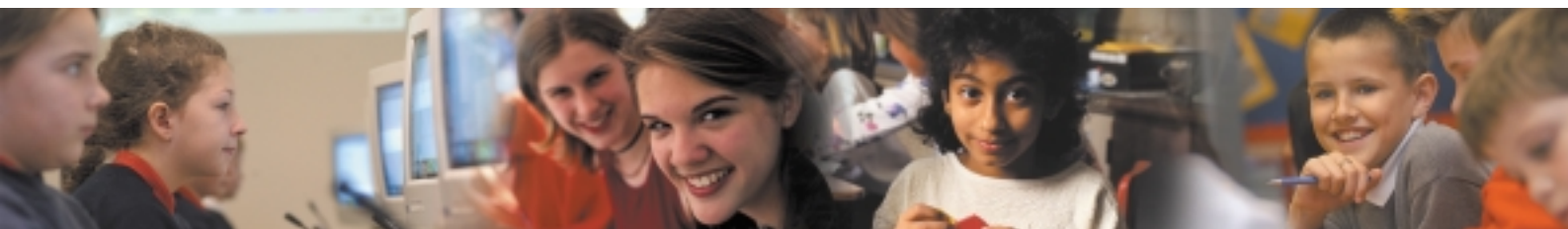


# a curriculum for excellence

The Curriculum Review Group



RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS



EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

# a curriculum for excellence

The Curriculum Review Group

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# contents

<b>foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>background</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>values</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>purposes of the curriculum from 3 to 18</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>principles for curriculum design</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>implications of the values, purposes and principles</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>appendix</b>	<b>18</b>





# foreword



The curriculum in Scotland has many strengths. Its well-respected curriculum for 3 to 5 year olds, its broad 5-14 curriculum, Standard Grade courses and the National Qualifications structure have been carefully designed to meet the needs of pupils at different stages. However, the various parts were developed separately and, taken together, they do not now provide the best basis for an excellent education for every child. The National Debate showed that people want a curriculum that will fully prepare today's children for adult life in the 21st century, be less crowded and better connected, and offer more choice and enjoyment.

**Our aspiration is to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society.**

*A Curriculum for Excellence* challenges us to achieve this aim. It establishes clear values, purposes and principles for education from 3 to 18 in Scotland. The document has profound implications for what is learned, how it is taught and what is assessed. It enables us to anticipate changes and challenges which young people will face in the future, to take account of advances in education and to tackle the aspects of the current curriculum which must be improved.

*A Curriculum for Excellence* is fully in harmony with the National Priorities, and will provide an important impetus to achieving our vision for children and young people, that all children and young people should be valued by being safe, nurtured, achieving, healthy, active, included, respected and responsible.



It provides a template for a phased process of reform, the details of which are set out more fully in our response. The outcomes we seek to achieve through this programme of reform will be:

- › **for the first time ever, a single curriculum 3-18, supported by a simple and effective structure of assessment and qualifications: this will allow the right pace and challenge for young people, particularly at critical points like the move from nursery to primary and from primary to secondary**
- › **greater choice and opportunity, earlier, for young people, to help them realise their individual talents and to help close the opportunity gap by better engaging those who currently switch off from formal education too young**
- › **more skills-for-work options for young people, robustly assessed and helping them to progress into further qualifications or work**
- › **more space in the curriculum for work in depth, and to ensure that young people develop the literacy, numeracy and other essential skills and knowledge they will need for life and work**
- › **young people achieving the broad outcomes that we look for from school education, both through subject teaching and more cross-subject activity**
- › **more space for sport, music, dance, drama, art, learning about health, sustainable development and enterprise, and other activities that broaden the life experiences – and life chances – of young people**

*A Curriculum for Excellence* gives us the opportunity to address important curricular issues which we know need to be tackled. We will therefore set in motion a programme of detailed, linked work to:

- › **have significantly decluttered the curriculum, particularly in key areas of primary, to free up more time for young people to achieve and to allow teachers the freedom to exercise judgement on appropriate learning for young people, by 2007**
- › **have restructured the curriculum in key areas of early secondary, to provide for depth as well as breadth in learning, and to ensure that pupils can see that they are working towards clear outcomes, by 2007**

- › **have introduced new skills-for-work courses for 14 to 16 year olds to broaden the range of educational experience for young people and ensure that they get appropriate recognition for achievements in developing work-related and other skills, by 2007**
- › **have agreed by 2006 the future structure of assessment and qualifications to support learning up to age 16, including simplifying the connections between assessment 5-14, Standard Grade and the National Qualifications, for implementation thereafter**
- › **have reformed the way we record the achievement of young people, to ensure that they can take on to the next stage of their lives a broad and rigorous record – not just of their academic work, but also of their vocational learning and their achievements beyond the traditional school curriculum, by 2007**

We fully endorse the work of the Curriculum Review Group which is set out in *A Curriculum for Excellence*. That document and our detailed response to the challenges identified by the Group are included as part of this package.

These documents provide a starting point for a continuous cycle of reflection, review and improvement which will actively involve young people, teachers and educators, parents, employers and the wider community. This is just the first stage. We are embarking together on a challenging process which will have a profound influence on our children's futures.



**Peter Peacock**

Minister for Education and Young People



**Euan Robson**

Deputy Minister for Education  
and Young People





# background

The Scottish Executive's vision for children and young people is “A Scotland in which every child matters, where every child, regardless of his or her family background, has the best possible start in life”.

The Education (Scotland) Act 2000 provides that “education should be directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential” and that “due regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, should be paid to the views of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect them, taking account of the child or young person’s age and maturity”.

The Act also makes provision for the five National Priorities for Education: Achievement and Attainment; Framework for Learning; Inclusion and Equality; Values and Citizenship; and Learning for Life. The Scottish Executive monitors how schools and authorities perform against all these National Priorities.

In 2002 the Scottish Executive undertook the most extensive consultation ever of the people of Scotland on the state of school education through the National Debate on Education. In the debate, many people – pupils, parents, teachers, employers and others – said that they valued and wanted to keep many aspects of the current curriculum. Some also made compelling arguments for changes to ensure all our young people achieve successful outcomes and are equipped to contribute effectively to the Scottish economy and society, now and in the future.

Features of our present curriculum that people valued included:

- › **the flexibility which already exists in the Scottish system – no one argued for a more prescriptive national system**
- › **the combination of breadth and depth offered by the curriculum**
- › **the quality of teaching**
- › **the quality of supporting material that helps teachers to deliver much of the current curriculum**
- › **the comprehensive principle**

People argued for changes which would:

- › **reduce over-crowding in the curriculum and make learning more enjoyable**
- › **better connect the various stages of the curriculum from 3 to 18**
- › **achieve a better balance between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ subjects and include a wider range of experiences**
- › **equip young people with the skills they will need in tomorrow’s workforce**
- › **make sure that assessment and certification support learning**
- › **allow more choice to meet the needs of individual young people**

It was against this educational backdrop that Ministers established a Review Group in November 2003. The task of the Review Group was to identify the purposes of education 3 to 18 and principles for the design of the curriculum. The Group was asked to take account of the views expressed during the National Debate, current research and international comparisons. As well as educational factors, the Group considered global factors which would have strong influences on the aims and purposes of education over the coming decades, including changing patterns of work, increased knowledge of how children learn and the potential of new technologies to enrich learning. In addition the Group was asked to take a broad view of children’s development, within the wider framework of Integrated Children’s Services, bearing in mind the wide range of adults directly involved in the education of children and young people, in early years centres, schools, colleges and out of school learning.

The result of this work is *A Curriculum for Excellence*.



This document identifies:

- › **the values upon which we believe the curriculum should be based**
- › **the purpose of the school curriculum 3 to 18 and the outcomes which we intend all young people to achieve**
- › **the design principles which schools, teachers and other educators will use to implement the curriculum, and which will be used in a process of national reform**

*A Curriculum for Excellence* can be used to stimulate constructive debate on learning and teaching, giving those involved at every level of Scottish education the opportunity to reflect on the purposes and principles behind the work they do.

# introduction

Each child has an enormous capacity for learning and the potential to achieve in different ways.

*A Curriculum for Excellence* applies to all children and young people from their earliest contact with the education system through to the time they leave school as young adults. It applies to the experiences provided in the different places where they go to learn: early years centres and nurseries; schools; and to colleges and others working in partnership with schools. It recognises the wide range of educators working in these sectors\*.

Because children learn through all of their experiences - in the family and community, pre-school centre, nursery and school - the curriculum needs to recognise and complement the contributions that these experiences can make.

The curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is designed to convey knowledge which is considered to be important and to promote the development of values, understanding and capabilities. It is concerned both with what is to be learned and how it is taught. It should enable all of the young people of Scotland to flourish as individuals, reach high levels of achievement, and make valuable contributions to society.

The curriculum affects us all.

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\* This document is intended to guide the work of educators in all sectors and places of learning which children attend from age 3 to the end of their compulsory education. Solely for reasons of simplicity we use the words 'schools' and 'teachers' to cover all stages and all educators.



## Why must the curriculum change?

Like other countries, we face new influences which mean that we must look differently at the curriculum. These include global social, political and economic changes, and the particular challenges facing Scotland: the need to increase the economic performance of the nation; reflect its growing diversity; improve health; and reduce poverty. In addition, we can expect more changes in the patterns and demands of employment, and the likelihood of new and quite different jobs during an individual's working life.

The educational process itself is changing. There is growing understanding of the different ways in which children learn and how best to support them. New technologies are making information available as never before and offer exciting potential to enrich learning. There is now an opportunity to recognise fully the talents and contributions of the growing range of adults currently involved in educating our children, and to reflect the developing role of the school as a partner with parents, other providers of services for children, colleges and other organisations, and the community.

Most importantly, although the current curriculum has many strengths, a significant proportion of young people in Scotland are not achieving all that they are capable of. We need a curriculum which will enable all young people to understand the world they are living in, reach the highest possible levels of achievement, and equip them for work and learning throughout their lives. It should:

- › **make learning active, challenging and enjoyable**
- › **not be too fragmented or over-crowded with content**
- › **connect the various stages of learning from 3 to 18**
- › **encourage the development of high levels of accomplishment and intellectual skill**
- › **include a wide range of experiences and achieve a suitable blend of what has traditionally been seen as 'academic' and 'vocational'**
- › **give opportunities for children to make appropriate choices to meet their individual interests and needs, while ensuring that these choices lead to successful outcomes**
- › **ensure that assessment supports learning**

Taken together, these factors provide challenging reasons for change.

The starting point for this process of change is the set of values which should underpin policies, practice and the curriculum itself.

# values

**Wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity: the words which are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament have helped to define values for our democracy.**

It is one of the prime purposes of education to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based and so help them to establish their own stances on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility. Young people therefore need to learn about and develop these values. The curriculum is an important means through which this personal development should be encouraged.

To achieve this, the curriculum:

- › **should enable all young people to benefit from their education, supporting them in different ways to achieve their potential**
- › **must value the learning and achievements of all young people and promote high aspirations and ambition**
- › **should emphasise the rights and responsibilities of individuals and nations. It should help young people to understand diverse cultures and beliefs and support them in developing concern, tolerance, care and respect for themselves and others**
- › **must enable young people to build up a strong foundation of knowledge and understanding and promote a commitment to considered judgement and ethical action**
- › **should give young people the confidence, attributes and capabilities to make valuable contributions to society**

In essence, it must be inclusive, be a stimulus for personal achievement and, through the broadening of pupils' experience of the world, be an encouragement towards informed and responsible citizenship.



# purposes of the curriculum from 3 - 18

Our aspiration for all children and for every young person is that they should be **successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens** and **effective contributors** to society and at work. By providing structure, support and direction to young people's learning, the curriculum should enable them to develop these four capacities. The curriculum should complement the important contributions of families and communities.

## successful learners

### with

- › enthusiasm and motivation for learning
- › determination to reach high standards of achievement
- › openness to new thinking and ideas

### and able to

- › use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- › use technology for learning
- › think creatively and independently
- › learn independently and as part of a group
- › make reasoned evaluations
- › link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations

## confident individuals

### with

- › self respect
- › a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- › secure values and beliefs
- › ambition

### and able to

- › relate to others and manage themselves
- › pursue a healthy and active lifestyle
- › be self aware
- › develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world
- › live as independently as they can
- › assess risk and take informed decisions
- › achieve success in different areas of activity

To enable all young people to become

## responsible citizens

### with

- › respect for others
- › commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life

### and able to

- › develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it
- › understand different beliefs and cultures
- › make informed choices and decisions
- › evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues
- › develop informed, ethical views of complex issues

## effective contributors

### with

- › an enterprising attitude
- › resilience
- › self-reliance

### and able to

- › communicate in different ways and in different settings
- › work in partnership and in teams
- › take the initiative and lead
- › apply critical thinking in new contexts
- › create and develop
- › solve problems

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

## How can schools achieve these purposes?

These purposes represent a very broad range of outcomes, including learning how to learn and the promotion of positive attitudes and attributes. The opportunity for children to develop the four capacities will strongly depend upon:

- › **the environment for learning**
- › **the choice of teaching and learning approaches**
- › **the ways in which learning is organised**

Respectful and constructive relationships are the starting point for successful learning. Schools and other educational settings can foster respect, responsibility and tolerance by living out their values, practising them within their own communities. By having high aspirations for each child, schools are able to support children in developing confidence and ambition.

Teachers and educators have a wide range of approaches to draw upon, and these need to be chosen carefully to support the purpose of learning in each particular case (so, for example, the development of informed views requires learners to engage in a process of constructive challenge and debate).

The learning will take place through a wide range of planned experiences. These will include environmental, scientific, technological, historical, social, economic, political, mathematical and linguistic contexts, the arts, culture and sports. Sometimes the experiences may be linked to particular vocational or other specialised contexts. To achieve this breadth will require both subject-based studies and activities which span several disciplines. Children will also learn through the day-to-day experiences of the life of the school community, with its values and social contact, and from out-of-school activities, events and celebrations. Taken together, these experiences should provide a motivating and enriching blend.

With support from education authorities and schools, teachers will have the task of providing activities which will enable each learner to develop to their full potential in the four capacities. Much of what is needed already exists, but it also requires clear guiding principles to assist teachers and schools in their practice and as a basis for continuing review, evaluation and improvement. These principles will apply to the curriculum at national, education authority, school and individual levels.





# principles for curriculum design

## Challenges and enjoyment

Young people should find their learning challenging, engaging and motivating. The curriculum should encourage high aspirations and ambitions for all. At all stages, learners of all aptitudes and abilities should experience an appropriate level of challenge, to enable each individual to achieve his or her potential. They should be active in their learning and have opportunities to develop and demonstrate their creativity. There should be support to enable young people to sustain their effort.

## Breadth

All young people should have opportunities for a broad, suitably-weighted range of experiences. The curriculum should be organised so that they will learn and develop through a variety of contexts within both the classroom and other aspects of school life.

## Progression

Young people should experience continuous progression in their learning from 3 to 18 within a single curriculum framework. Each stage should build upon earlier knowledge and achievements. Young people should be able to progress at a rate which meets their needs and aptitudes, and keep options open so that routes are not closed off too early.

## Depth

There should be opportunities for young people to develop their full capacity for different types of thinking and learning. As they progress, they should develop and apply increasing intellectual rigour, drawing different strands of learning together and exploring and achieving more advanced levels of understanding.

## Personalisation and choice

The curriculum should respond to individual needs and support particular aptitudes and talents. It should give each young person increasing opportunities for exercising responsible personal choice as they move through their school career. Once they have achieved suitable levels of attainment across a wide range of areas of learning the choice should become as open as possible. There should be safeguards to ensure that choices are soundly based and lead to successful outcomes.

## Coherence

Taken as a whole, children's learning activities should combine to form a coherent experience. There should be clear links between the different aspects of young people's learning, including opportunities for extended activities which draw different strands of learning together.

## Relevance

Young people should understand the purposes of their activities. They should see the value of what they are learning and its relevance to their lives, present and future.

Although all should apply at any one stage, the principles will have different emphases as a young person learns and develops. So, for example, the need for breadth will apply very strongly in the earlier stages, to ensure that a child will gain knowledge and understanding across a wide range of areas of learning. More options for specialisation will be available later, once essential outcomes have been achieved. The nature of choice will also change as a child develops, for example starting with choices in play activities, moving through choices in topics and contexts for learning and eventually reaching opportunities for decisions between programmes which may have implications for subsequent careers.

There will need to be sufficient flexibility in the way in which teaching and learning is managed to find the right blend and balance for each young person for their particular stage and circumstances. To enhance opportunities and allow greater personalisation of learning, schools will need to look beyond their own expertise and resources so that their students can have access to suitable provision. This may be through technologies to make connections between learners and teachers at a distance, or partnerships with other schools and colleges.



# implications of the values, purposes and principles

Taken together, the values, purposes and principles imply changes and developments which will mean:

## for young people:

- › higher standards of achievement through a clearer focus on the purposes of learning activities, leading through to broader choices as they progress through school; better progression from one level to the next; assessment which promotes learning and recognises different types of achievements; scope for more enjoyment in learning

## for parents:

- › a clear understanding of the learning opportunities their children should have, ways in which they can support their children's learning; the purposes of these activities; and the recognition which children will receive for their achievements

## for teachers, schools, early years centres and colleges:

- › clarity about what education is seeking to achieve for each child; flexibility to apply professional judgement in planning programmes and activities to respond to the needs of individual children; a curriculum which is not overcrowded because of too much content; more teaching across and beyond traditional subject boundaries; time and space for innovative and creative teaching and learning

### for employers and providers of higher education:

- › better preparation for further study and work through improved skills, greater confidence and improved attitudes to enterprise, work and lifelong learning

### for the education system:

- › a responsibility to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are directed to achieving the purposes and principles set out here and that qualifications reflect this fully; a responsibility to ensure that initial training and continuing professional development of teachers and educators equip them fully for their task; and a commitment to a continuing programme of refreshment and review of the curriculum

### for society:

- › confidence that children and young people are being enabled to reach the highest levels of achievement as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work.



# appendix

## Membership of the Curriculum Review Group

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Head of Children's Services, Stirling Council

Chief Inspector, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

Principal Teacher – Support for Learning, Govan High School, Glasgow

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