

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

This guide outlines the major issues that schools and colleges need to consider when embarking on a new initiative at Key stage 4. It provides advice on:

- starting out
- auditing the curriculum
- making curriculum change a high priority
- planning and resources
- supporting staff to achieve success.

Starting out

Each school and college will start the process of developing the curriculum from a different point and will want to assess the advantages and disadvantages of a new initiative in the light of a number of factors including:

- the ethos of the school or college – how is the initiative judged to fit with the values and culture of the institution, its staff and learners and the wider community it serves?
- the rationale for adopting the initiative – are there compelling educational or financial reasons to get involved?
- the extent to which the new initiative enhances the curriculum offer – are there obvious added benefits for current and future learners over and above the current curriculum offer? Will the initiative enhance learners' post-16 progression opportunities?
- the impact on staff – what will be the likely reaction from those affected by the new initiative? Does the expertise exist to make it successful? Are staff already over-stretched due to other, more valuable initiatives?

- the support of parents – if it means offering unfamiliar courses or reduced options to learners, will parents be supportive or will it be an uphill struggle to recruit learners?
- the curriculum available in the locality – are local schools and colleges also taking on the initiative and does that affect your decision? Are there opportunities to collaborate to maximise the benefits to learners and share the development costs? Are there implications arising from the role and policies of the local Learning and Skills Council?

Auditing the curriculum

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

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

Making curriculum change a high priority

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

- appointing a member of the SMT to take responsibility for the initiative
- providing a clear picture of how the initiative will affect teachers, learners and the institution as a whole
- ensuring that governors are involved in decisions about curriculum innovations; if they feel a sense of commitment, they are far more likely to provide the support needed for success. Consider asking one governor to be actively involved in overseeing the initiative, to ensure it gets support at the highest level
- making curriculum development issues a top priority for debate at SMT meetings, to ensure that throughout the development, implementation and evaluation phases SMT members are kept informed of progress and can have an input
- ensuring that any changes to the curriculum are explicit in strategic, operation and development plans
- telling parents and learners about the initiative. Explain the rationale, report on progress and communicate successes at all stages.

Supporting staff to achieve success

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

- providing a clear, positive vision of the initiative and the benefits it will bring to learners
- ensuring that an SMT member has a working knowledge and understanding of the demands of the new curriculum initiative
- taking time to find out the strengths, talents, experience and abilities of staff members
- consulting with staff from the outset, to involve them and develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the initiative
- providing training and INSET to meet the professional development needs of all staff who are asked to get involved in implementing the new initiative
- involving staff and departments that are committed to change and innovation
- explaining why staff are involved and what skills and experience they bring to the initiative
- making sure a senior member of staff is available to advise and lead teachers in their preparation

- holding regular meetings to ensure all staff, not just those directly involved in teaching or managing the initiative, are kept informed of developments
- channelling resources to where they are needed most and ensuring that the new initiative gets a fair deal in terms of budget
- fostering an innovative culture in which all initiatives, whatever the origin, are considered positively as having potential benefits for the institution.

Planning and resources

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

- Be realistic about the timescales involved and the resources needed to implement effective change; successful change comes about when staff have had 9–12 months to plan and prepare.
 - Establish a tight budget that is dedicated to the initiative and cannot be used to fund other activities.
 - Take into account people's readiness and capacity for change; look for and use innovators and enthusiasts among the staff who will motivate others.
 - Set realistic deadlines and keep to them.
- Ensure that the person responsible for timetabling understands the needs of the initiative and takes them into account.
 - Recognise any casualties of an initiative and plan how to handle them, by retraining or other staff development activities.
 - Make use of external sources of support and advice, much of which is available free of charge (eg from the Learning and Skills Development Agency, awarding bodies and LEA networks).
 - Cost the demands on resources realistically (such as the materials' budgets of departments involved, specialist equipment, accommodation needs) and ensure that the SMT members are aware of the initiative's impact on the budget.
 - Recognise the need for review and evaluation, and provide staff with time for both; without this phase, important lessons may not be learnt and opportunities to share good practice lost.

Further information

Learning and Skills Development Agency

Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London
W1F 7LS
Tel 020 7297 9000
www.LSDA.org.uk

Contact the Vocational Learning Support Programme – 14–16 for information on all aspects of vocational and work-related learning at Key stage 4.

Vocational Learning Support Programme – 14–16

Tel 020 7297 9140
www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Websites

www.aqa.org.uk
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.edexcel.org.uk
www.ocr.org.uk
www.qca.org.uk
www.wjec.org.uk

Further reading

Jones CA and Anderson M (2001). *Managing curriculum change*. Learning and Skills Development Agency (ISBN 1 85338 642 1).

Jones CA, Potter M and Ebrahim N (2001). *Managing curriculum change in schools*. Learning and Skills Development Agency (ISBN 1 85338 710 X).

Quick guides

Project manager: Ian Duckett
Edited and designed by thingswedo
Printed by Blackmore Ltd
© Learning and Skills Development Agency
2nd edition, February 2005