

The curriculum for excellence



In August 2010, as Scotland's pupils return to school after the summer holidays, the headlines in the newspapers report confusion as the new Curriculum for Excellence is implemented.

The Herald online reported the teaching unions advising that teachers across Scotland are facing “ burn-out” over the delivery of the new school curriculum because of a lack of time and resources, and the Edinburgh Evening News online reported that Liberal Democrat MSP Margaret Smith regarded the SNP government's handling of the introduction of the new school curriculum as “ shambolic”.

What is the Curriculum for Excellence?

The Curriculum for Excellence developed from a widespread consultation exercise on schools for the 21st century, carried out by the Scottish Executive in 2002.

The debate obtained over 1500 responses and it is estimated that 20, 000 people took part.

The outline for change was for greater flexibility and choice in the school curriculum, and the need for well-built and well-resourced schools.

The national debate was a new approach to developing policy, which tried to include those who are not normally heard in policy formulation, such as parents, teachers and pupils, in the research. People were asked what they felt the best things about Scottish education are, what the main things are that need to be improved, and how we can get children more interested in learning.

Some of the issues arising from the research included improving pupil's behaviour, more resources, and curriculum reform in secondary education. (Munn et al, 2004)

In response to the national Debate, the Scottish executive published 'Educating for Excellence, Choice and Opportunity' in January 2003. This outlined the following key priorities:

Increase pupil choice.

Simplify and reduce the amount of assessment.

Reduce class sizes and improve pupil/teacher ratios.

Tackle discipline problems and bullying.

Improve school buildings.

Give more control over budgets to head teachers.

Have teachers work across primary and secondary schools.

Involve parents more in their children's education.

Strengthen the role of inspection. (Scottish Executive, 2003)

The Curriculum review group was established in 2003 with the ambitions of all children developing their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

A Curriculum for Excellence was published in 2004, followed by Building the Curriculum series in 2006.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-curriculum-for-excellence/>

In 2007, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the report – Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland, and in 2009, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published Improving Scottish Education. The two reports praised much strength within Scottish education; however they also identified areas for improvement, stating that there are still issues with inequality, and many of Scotland’s young people are leaving secondary education with minimal or no qualifications.

The Curriculum for Excellence aims to address the issues identified, by ensuring that all children and young people in Scotland develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they will need if they are to do well in life, learning and work, now and in the future, through the four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. (LTS, internet source)

The Building the Curriculum series of documents provides advice, guidance and policy for different aspects of Curriculum for Excellence:

Building the Curriculum 1 (2006) – how different subject areas can contribute to the CfE.

Building the Curriculum 2: Active learning in the early years (2007) – looks at active learning, and the learning experiences, within pre-school and early years pupils.

Building the Curriculum 3 (2008) – the framework for planning the 3 – 18 curriculum, focusing on developing the four capacities at every stage.

Building the Curriculum 4 (2009) – skills for learning, life and work, and how they can be developed within the senior phase.

Building the Curriculum 5 (2010): A framework for assessment – provides a framework for methods of assessment to support the learning for 3 to 18.

(Ibid)

The CfE is not intended to be as prescriptive as the previous curriculum, therefore it should be possible for teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the specific needs of their own pupils, and to focus on enriching the learning experience for all pupils. Literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing are intended to permeate right across the whole curriculum, and teachers will be free to focus on making these subjects more relevant and engaging. (Smith, 2009) Having said that, literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing have always been there, hidden within the curriculum, without teachers actually realising it. All subjects use various types of terminology which pupils learn, most if not all, use numeracy e. g. time-lines in history, map references in geography, weights and measures in home economics, and so on. The problem lies with literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing being documented in the new curriculum, causing concern amongst teachers, who are of the assumption that they have to teach subjects they are not specialists of, and also being unsure of how they can be incorporated into their subject.

Although the CfE promotes more autonomy within schools, Ronnie Smith the EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland) General Secretary, states that there are major challenges. Feedback from teachers highlights a shortage of funds,

resources and development time to support the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence.

A survey carried out by the EIS suggested teachers were concerned about various issues such as:

The timetable being unrealistic and too demanding.

More clarity on the role of assessment is needed.

Too many questions – not enough answers.

CfE has not been clear enough.

Not enough time allowed for implementation.

Whilst the teaching unions support the implementation of CfE, it was felt that more time was needed for planning, however the government declined the unions' request to delay the implementation.

Priestley and Humes (2010), note that The Curriculum for Excellence has the potential to transform teaching and learning in Scottish schools but, suggests it is restrictive, superficial, and vague, similar to the English curriculum 100 years ago. They argue that the educational developments in Scotland have ignored the theoretical perceptiveness provided by the vast amount of research in curriculum development, which has resulted in a problematic curriculum.

MacLellan and Soden (2008), maintain that both teachers and learners need to have an understanding of learning theories to enable successful

curriculum reform, but Priestly and Humes (2010), suggest that the pedagogical processes that form the basis of the experiences of learning within the Curriculum for Excellence are lacking, there are no significant details and explanations provided for either the terminology or the recommendations; nor is there any specific detailed guidance on the type of approaches to teaching, such as co-operative learning, and active learning, therefore, it should be regarded as a broad framework that forms the basis of future policy development, rather than an extended rationale.

Reeves (2008) suggests the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence is a test case for the adaptability of the education service, especially in the secondary sector, as it necessitates a fundamental change in practice for both teachers and schools; and would require a significant change in what it is to be a teacher in terms of both identity and practice.

When discussing reports by Cordingley et al. (2003, 2005), and Adey et al. (2004), Reeves suggests that the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence is unlikely to be achieved if the Quality Control approach to school organization is not considerably modified. Also, the implementation of a flatter management structure and the professional actions associated with Chartered Teacher status, implies that introducing interdisciplinary practices, collaboration and evidence-informed approaches to teaching in schools, could cause problems; also, notions based on ‘distributed’ leadership’, and ‘teacher leadership’ are contested at all levels within schools.

Reeves argues that to implement the new curriculum, more opportunities for professional learning will be required;

The key lies in improving the educative capacity of the system for all those involved, both educators and students. (Reeves 2008, p15)

But, with the current economic climate as it is, local authorities have been cutting back to save money, therefore the funding for CPD opportunities may not be available.