

## ISSUES PAPER 7

# *The Whole Curriculum 14-19*

April 2008

### Introduction

Following its Annual Reports in 2004, 2005 and 2006, the Nuffield Review is producing *Issues Papers* on specific areas of concern with a view to widening the debate, testing conclusions and seeking further evidence. One area of crucial importance is that of curriculum development for an ever more diverse 14-19 phase.

It is now 20 years since the launch of the National Curriculum for all young people up to the age of 16. *Given the massive changes in society which affect all young people and given the problems which the Review has identified, is there not a need to re-appraise, not just the details of the curriculum, but also the very nature of 'a National Curriculum' and of 'whole curriculum planning'?*

This *Issues Paper*, therefore, examines the notions of 'the whole curriculum', 'curriculum development', the principles which should guide such development, and the role of the teacher in that development.

### Context

#### *Twenty Years of the National Curriculum*

The experience of most young people up to the age of 16 has been shaped in England and Wales by a National Curriculum (NC), established by the 1988 Education Act. As originally conceived and implemented, the National Curriculum was intended to take central control of what was taught in state schools, and so was intentionally detailed and prescriptive. Over time, into the twenty-first century, though levels

of detail and prescription have reduced, new kinds of complexity have appeared, particularly in the 14–19 sector. This section looks at that historical process and brings critical judgment to bear on the government’s proposals for the future.

The 1988 Act defined a ten-subject curriculum, with 10 Levels of attainment in each subject. Four Key Stages were defined, ending respectively at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16, with formal assessment at the end of each Key Stage. Curriculum content was specified in detail, through a structure of attainment targets, statements of attainment and programmes of study. So, for example, the first version of the Geography NC had five attainment targets, 183 statements of attainment and detailed requirements for each programme of study.

### ***Slimming Down Begins***

In 1994, however, in response to criticisms that the NC had become too unwieldy, the Dearing Report<sup>1</sup> recommended a slimmed down version which would occupy only 80% of school time, thereby providing opportunity for greater flexibility and variety. There was a further review of the NC by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 1999/2000, with a view to encouraging greater freedom and flexibility within the overall framework, but the QCA’s own monitoring of the curriculum showed that schools continued to treat the framework prescriptively<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dearing Report, 1994, *The National Curriculum and its Assessment*, London: SCAA.

<sup>2</sup> QCA, 2001, *Monitoring Report on the Curriculum*.

### ***The Appearance of Alternatives at 14-19***

The dilution of the original proposals in England was increased in 2002 by the decision to make the teaching of Modern Languages no longer compulsory for 14-16 year olds, thereby freeing up time for more practical activities and work experience for those for whom these are thought more appropriate. To this end, alternative courses of a more pre-vocational and vocational nature were actively encouraged with the availability of vocational GCSEs and A Levels, GNVQs and BTEC Awards, the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP)<sup>3</sup> and now the 17 ‘lines’ of the new Diploma (the first five of which are to be available from September, 2008). There is also a further review of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3, for implementation in 2008, together with a revision of the criteria to be met by GCSE at Key Stage 4 in 2009, and then of A Level examinations.

### ***Gathering up the Pieces***

In 2007, in response both to the piecemeal changes and to the emerging demands made upon the curriculum, the QCA announced its idea of a new secondary school curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in England. The curriculum, according to the QCA<sup>4</sup>, would ensure, in a way that the National Curriculum had not:

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<sup>3</sup> IPF for 14-16 year olds created ‘enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities’ through partnerships between schools, colleges of F.E. and other agencies.

About 300 such partnerships have been formed.

<sup>4</sup> See QCA, 2007, *What has Changed and Why*.

(a) relevance to living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by a focus upon *topics* such as climate change and nuclear power, or upon *themes* (e.g. understanding of British cultural identity) or *dimensions* across subjects, which should determine the selection of subject matter; and,

(b) greater freedom for teachers from the constraints of a traditional ‘subject based curriculum’ (although such freedom would be limited – the prescribed list of ‘great writers’ in English or of World Wars in History would, for example, remain compulsory).

These changes and their implications for 14-19 have prompted the Review to consider the impact of the curriculum as a whole upon the learning experiences of young people. The greater freedom is an important step forward. But have the Government in England and the QCA got it right? And can England learn lessons from the different developments in Wales?

In addressing these questions, the Review sees the need for

- clarification of what ‘curriculum’ (rather than ‘specification’ or ‘course’) means;
- recognition of the ‘contested nature’ of any curriculum prescription<sup>5</sup>;
- principles to guide the development of the curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century;

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<sup>5</sup> See *Issues Paper 6* which points to the inevitable lack of consensus over the aims and values which are embodied in the curriculum.

- strategy for curriculum development, based on experience from the past and on recognition of the diversity of aims;
- support for teachers as they make use of greater freedom and flexibility. This should recognise that for twenty years teachers have been subjected to rigorously enforced central prescription of what and how to teach.

## Wales

In Wales, after devolution of educational services, a slightly different path was trodden from that of England. ‘Learning Pathways 14-19 Years’<sup>6</sup> (built on the 2003 Action Plan) consists of a blend of six key elements: individual learning pathways, wider choice and flexibility of programmes and ways of learning, a learning ‘core’ from 14-19, learning coach support, access to personal support, and impartial careers advice. The emphasis, therefore, is on individual differences and on meeting those differences, facilitated initially by local Community Consortia for Education and Training and by Young People’s Partnerships.

A more balanced and holistic approach than in England is reflected in the creation of the Welsh Baccalaureate. This is an overarching award at three levels – advanced, intermediate and foundation<sup>7</sup>. It provides, within an

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<sup>6</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19*

<sup>7</sup> [www.welshbaccalaureate.org.uk](http://www.welshbaccalaureate.org.uk)

integrated framework, different pathways and options. Moreover, it contains within the core studies a requirement to study ‘Wales, Europe and the World’ – assuring therefore a humanities component throughout 14-19.

### Curriculum: What do we mean?

‘Curriculum’ means different things to different people. Necessarily, therefore, in this section we try to tease out some meanings and interpretations.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a curriculum is a course of study. As such, a curriculum such as the National Curriculum specifies learning content to be covered (e.g. ‘cell’ or ‘organism’ in biology), the structure of that coverage (e.g. how such concepts as ‘cell’ and ‘organism’ interrelate, and how such concepts might be progressively presented to the learner), *standards* by which learning is assessed, and ideally some indication of the approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The content to be covered refers not simply to factual knowledge, but more importantly to key concepts and principles embodied within the subject (e.g. in biology, such interrelated concepts as organism, cell, tissues, organs, etc.<sup>8</sup>) and the skills required for active inquiry (e.g. map reading in Geography<sup>9</sup>).

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<sup>8</sup> See Phenix, P.H., 1964, *Realms of Meaning*, for a detailed account of the different ways of conceiving the physical and social worlds which so influenced curriculum developers in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>9</sup> See Rawlings, E., forthcoming, *Planning the KS3 Curriculum*, for a detailed example of curriculum planning and development within Geography

The clear implication of that definition is that a curriculum is a prescription. That’s to say it specifies a group of learners and sets out what, and how, they are to be taught. The level of detail of the prescription can vary, and if it reduces to the point of being very ‘broad-brush’ and general in nature, the looser term ‘curriculum framework’ might be used – the term implying that it leaves room for local curriculum variation and development.

### ***Necessity of accepting that a curriculum might not work.***

If a curriculum is a prescription, it follows that like any other prescription, it may not work in practice. The goals might be found to be unrealistic, the side effects might militate against the educational values, the concepts highlighted might not be the central ones, the teacher’s talents might justify different approaches. Hence, Stenhouse likened the curriculum to

‘an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice’<sup>10</sup>.

A curriculum is something which specifies the principles for educational practice, not the practice itself, and it needs to be written with sufficient clarity and precision that it can be tested (and found wanting) in the experience of particular teachers in specific school contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> Stenhouse, L., 1975, *Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann, p4.

That process of testing, in schools, by teachers, becomes necessarily more difficult when the curriculum is handed down from above. There are severe limits to a centrally prescribed curriculum, and lessons are to be learnt from recent experience of central interventions in post 16 curriculum – namely, the problems arising from the introduction of Curriculum 2000<sup>11</sup>.

Within the general definition of a curriculum as a prescribed course of study covering content, structure and standards, however, there's still room for significant differences of interpretation. The Review identified three particular areas of difference –

- Whether curriculum planning should be outcomes based or process based.
- Whether the units of organisation should be topics or subjects.
- To what extent the curriculum is, or should be, developed by teachers.

## Alternative models

### Outcomes-based

The outcomes-based curriculum has become the largely unquestioned default model, presumably because it's assumed to produce people who have the skills and attributes appropriate to society's perceived needs. Tyler's classic statement of an *outcomes-based curriculum*<sup>12</sup>

influenced generations of curriculum development in North America and Britain. Essentially, it was that of (i) stating overall aims, (ii) translating these aims into specific outcomes, (iii) selecting content which, together with (iv) teaching method, would be likely to achieve these objectives, and (v) evaluating the outcomes against the objectives. If the intended outcomes did not occur, then either content or teaching method needed to be changed.

This outcomes based model is seductive, and, therefore, is the model for much recent curriculum planning. National Vocational Qualifications were based on that model, following the influential work of Jessup<sup>13</sup>. The plethora of targets which shape learning programmes in schools and colleges reflect the idea, first, that there is a need to set explicit targets, often by people outside the actual 'curriculum delivery', and, second, that anyone following a prescribed pathway will achieve those targets. The new lines of Diploma, for example, have their targets defined by sector skills' experts, disconnected from the activities which are supposed to attain them and not to be questioned too closely by the teachers who 'deliver' them. Targets, as for the current reforms of A Level, are made explicit in the ever more detailed specifications for obtaining the qualification. As one sixth former said in her e-mail to the Review, following *Issue Paper 6, Aims and Values*:

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<sup>11</sup> See Breslin, T., 2008, Unpublished thesis *Teachers, Schools and Change: Lessons from Curriculum 2000 for Education Policymakers*, University of London Institute of Education.

<sup>12</sup> Tyler, R.W., 1949, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, University of Chicago Press.

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<sup>13</sup> Jessup, G., 1991, *Outcomes: NVQs and the Emerging Model of Education and Training*, London: Falmer Press.

‘Far too often in education the emphasis is on achieving targets and regurgitating what the exam board wants, as opposed to actually teaching children something. As a sixth form student myself, this frustrates me on a daily basis, especially in history, when we must learn to write to the specifications of the exam board, instead of actually learning about the past. As someone who understands what forcing us to conform to such rigid ideals as opposed to developing our own style will eventually mean for our education, I think I speak for many people when I say thank you for standing up for learning and teaching; the way it is supposed to be’.

Generally speaking England has an outcomes- and qualifications-led reform of curriculum.

### **Process-based**

An alternative process-based way of looking at the curriculum is that of focusing upon the learning activities which teachers and young people are already engaged in - the process of thinking, theoretical or practical, which characterises, for example, doing science or woodworking or painting or hairdressing or appreciating the arts. Such activities embody, though usually only implicitly, aims, standards of correctness, and methods of engaging young people’s commitment. In order to improve such curriculum activities, the teacher needs to reflect upon the aims which are embodied within them and upon the appropriateness of the aims, content, teaching methods and assessment. But the ends to be achieved (the capacity to think, to evaluate, or to design, for instance) are not something

separate from the activity itself. And assessment of the value of the activity is one which is made by the expert practitioner (e.g. the trained biologist or carpenter or beautician), who is skilled in the subject, and who also knows the learner’s strengths and needs. Such professional judgement is not a ‘tick box’ exercise.

### **Curriculum Development**

The term “curriculum development” is very commonly used. The Review suggests, however, that where a curriculum is centrally prescribed and outcomes based, there’s little room for true curriculum development, which we see as a constant restructuring of aims, content, relevant standards, teaching methods and assessment with a view to the improvement of learning. We see ‘curriculum development’ as more than ‘curriculum planning’ which can take place without curriculum development and without critical research into practice. In such a revision, the practices themselves need to be examined and evaluated as well as the ideas and values which underpin those practices. As Stenhouse argued in his seminal book on curriculum development,

‘Its characteristic insistence is that ideas should encounter the discipline of practice and that practice should be principled by ideas’<sup>14</sup>.

To that end, the aims, content, standards, and methods should be so precisely formulated as to be open to critical scrutiny in the light of ethical debate and empirical evidence.

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<sup>14</sup> Stenhouse, L., 1975 *Introduction to Curriculum Development and Research*, London, Heinemann, p. 3.

‘Curriculum development’, in this sense, has been a forgotten term ever since the demise of the Schools Council<sup>15</sup> in the late 1980s, as it was overtaken by a more centralised and outcome-based curriculum and led by an ever more detailed specification of what is required to attain a particular qualification. It is worth recalling some of the innovations which did take place under the aegis of the Council. These transformed the curriculum and were essentially teacher led – Nuffield Sciences, Humanities Curriculum Project, Geography for the Young School Leaver, Geography 16-19, History 13-16, and many others. Add to these the pioneering work of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) established by the Manpower Services Commission in 1982<sup>16</sup>, which addressed many of the issues which currently are being ‘solved’ by the more centralised and outcomes based interventions.

In such curriculum development, implicit aims receive particular scrutiny. Rarely has the importance of this been so urgent, as education and training are being extended to all young people up to 18 – something never attempted before in England. Such a scrutiny must examine what is worthwhile for these young people in this particular context. It needs to start with the learners and to recognise the differences in motivation,

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<sup>15</sup> The Schools Council, established in 1964, provided funding for many curriculum projects which gave teachers the opportunity to develop the curriculum in order to address problems they encountered in the classroom. Connected with Schools Council projects was a national network of “Teachers Centres” for curriculum and teacher development.

<sup>16</sup> See Dale, R. et al, 1990, *The TVEI Story*, Open University Press.

understanding and interests. One size (of National Curriculum or of any qualification) will not fit all<sup>17</sup>.

But such an approach to curriculum development is largely eliminated by the qualifications-led developments and the associated standardised assessments. These get in the way of the more individually designed programmes (‘personalised learning’) which were intrinsic to earlier more process-led curriculum development, especially, though by no means exclusively, within the vocational area<sup>18</sup>. Failure to recognise that is likely to create problems for the new Diplomas, especially at Levels 1 and 2. These will be expected to cater especially for a group which has been failed by previous curriculum offerings.

## Subjects or topics

The “subjects or topics?” debate has cropped at various times, in various ways over the years. Essentially, it goes like this:

Are subjects just arbitrary social constructs, thrown up by a series of accidents of educational history, and irrelevant to today’s young learners? Or are they philosophically robust and distinct forms of knowledge, established routes into accumulated wisdom? Is it possible to argue that a learner really needs to approach a topic through the disciplined methodology of established subjects?

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<sup>17</sup> Fletcher, M. et al., 2007, CfBT

<sup>18</sup> FEU, 1980 *Experience, Reflection and Learning*, London, DES.

The QCA is currently advocating a curriculum which is shaped partly by topics such as that of global warming or the use of nuclear power. This is contrasted with a curriculum based largely on subjects. Critics of the subject-centred approach regard ‘subjects’ as ‘social constructions’ disconnected from the interests and motivations of most young people.

This is a very old debate, and one which frequently pays scant attention to the nature of the ‘public knowledge’ (what the philosopher John Dewey referred to as the ‘accumulated wisdom of the race’), to which the curriculum should give access and which should inform the interests and topics pursued by young people. Dewey has often been identified as an advocate of the project or topic based curriculum. All the more reason, therefore, to look carefully at what he has to say. In this passage, he first approves of seizing opportunities which bring the curriculum to life, but then adds a crucial caveat saying, in effect, that while current affairs topics are fine for motivation, you can’t run the whole curriculum like that.

‘The problem of selection and organisation of subject matter for study and learning is fundamental. Improvisation that takes advantage of special occasions (and events) prevents teaching and learning from being stereotyped and dead. But the basic material of study cannot be picked up in a cursory manner ----- there is a decided difference between using them in a continuing line of activity and trusting to them to provide the chief material of learning’<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Dewey, J., 1938, *Experience and Education*, quoted in Rawling, E. *Planning the Key Stage 3 Geography Curriculum*, Geographical Association, forthcoming

## **Accumulated Wisdom and Public Knowledge.**

Applying Dewey’s argument, we’re suggesting that, yes, global warming and the pros and cons of nuclear power are certainly valid areas of study. They’re important in themselves, and have the capacity to motivate young students. But, again following Dewey, we argue that they don’t in themselves offer a means of studying the immensely complicated and powerful influences, over time and across the globe, that have caused them to become urgent matters. For that, teachers need to draw upon the traditions of thinking, doing and making which we have inherited: the traditions of public knowledge which provide tools for understanding the physical, social and moral worlds we inhabit, and for acting intelligently within them. Such public knowledge is itself the result of what the philosopher Mickael Oakeshott<sup>20</sup> referred to as the ‘conversations between the generations of mankind’.

The job of the teacher is to initiate their students into the different voices of Oakeshott’s “conversation” – the voices of science, of history, poetry, of philosophy. In this way they, too, will be better able to understand those matters of deep human and personal concern. Subjects have gained a bad reputation over the years. They’re seen by critics as vehicles for passive learning -- ‘bodies of knowledge’ to be transmitted as such, and no doubt that is what they often become – not least because of the pressure of high stakes testing.

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<sup>20</sup> Oakeshott, M., 1972, ‘Education: the engagement and its frustration’, in Fuller, T. (ed) *Michael Oakeshott and Education*, Yale University Press.



### **Access to ways of thinking.**

Subjects needn't be inert bodies of knowledge. They are but the provisional ways in which knowledge is organised for further scholarship, critical scrutiny and communication. The different subjects give access to processes of thinking which in turn require a mastery of the distinctive concepts and modes of enquiry, and which, as Jerome Bruner so eloquently argued, can be put across to young people at any age in some mode of representation<sup>21</sup>. The danger in seeing 'topics' as alternatives to subjects is that important issues will be tackled superficially, without the understanding which can arise only from a grasp of key concepts and modes of enquiry through which such topics as climate change or nuclear power can be understood.

### **Curriculum Development and the teacher's role.**

The curriculum, therefore, is the forum in which the teacher mediates those public traditions of knowing, creating and making to the personal lives, questions and puzzles of the young learner. Personal understanding and ways of thinking are transformed through the contact with the minds of others who have been there before.

The teacher, crucially, inhabits both worlds – that of the public traditions and that of the contexts of the young learners. Good carpentry teaching calls for a good carpenter who is sensitive to the needs of the individual apprentice. Good geography teaching calls for a good geographer who understands the interests and learning capacity of each student.

That process of matching -- understanding the thinking, aspirations and motivations of the young person on the one hand, and distilling what is relevant in those public traditions to that understanding on the other – is what we call curriculum development – and it inevitably follows that the teacher (not civil servants or QCA or sector skills councils) ought to be at the centre of it. Of course they must make partnerships with those who can help in the critical examination of educational practices (e.g. academic experts in the subject, employers who understand employment needs). But only teachers can have the close and relevant knowledge of the particular learners and contexts, or be in the position to scrutinise the underpinning values which shape the curriculum experience.

### **The changing role of the teacher.**

By the late 1970s, the creative development of the curriculum, especially as a result of the work of the Schools Council, had become a clear part of the teacher's role. It was understood that the curriculum and assessment were dynamic elements in the educational system and there was a belief that further change, to meet changing circumstances or in response to criticism of current practice, could and should build, but critically, on current practices. Key characteristics of good school-based curriculum development were:

- Shared control of the curriculum (i.e. a balance between central frameworks, guidance and teacher interpretation and initiative);

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<sup>21</sup> Bruner, J., 1960, *The Process of Education*, Harvard University press.

- Curriculum development as a cooperative venture between schools, higher education, professional bodies and examination boards;
- Different elements of the curriculum (content, standards, teaching and learning strategies and assessment) all seen as integral and interacting parts of the system;
- Teacher development and subject-based professionalism seen as central to curriculum development – not as the implementation of the development already planned elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the teacher's role has been reframed since the 1990s so that they have become 'deliverers' of centralised prescriptions of content and skills. And professional development has been reframed accordingly. Too often such professional development consists of training programmes for delivering the changing targets and strategies emanating from national policy.

### Looking to the Future

Frequent 'corrections' to the National Curriculum, introduction of more vocational and practical activities, concern for relevance to the 21st Century, introduction of new subjects or topics, disengagement of many young people from formal learning, criticisms from employers - all these contemporary concerns require a more convincing overview of the curriculum and its development than has yet been given. In pursuit of this, the QCA claims to have put forward a framework, not a detailed prescription, and to have highlighted key concepts and skills for each subject, and to have given criteria for developing

each subject further. It also highlights other important priorities such as cross-curricular dimensions, as well as personal, learning and thinking skills.

The QCA is to be commended for attempting, in this latest review, to provide a curriculum framework which respects the freedom of teachers to innovate and of schools to be creative in putting the whole curriculum together. If it's going to work, however, the following would seem to be crucial:

- Start, and constantly revisit, the question *What counts as an educated 19 year old in this day and age?*, and let the answers provide the coherence to the curriculum – rather than a centrally devised and confusing 'big picture' (see [www.qca.org.uk/](http://www.qca.org.uk/)) of cross-curricular dimensions, themes, topics, thinking skills, functional skills, useful knowledge and subjects. As Lambert argues, 'Content debates are inevitably guided by revisiting what we imagine are the characteristics (in terms of knowledge, skills, understanding and values) of an educated young person in the early years of the 21st century'<sup>22</sup>.
- Value, and incorporate into curriculum thinking for all learners, the practical modes of intelligent engagement with the world and with other people.

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<sup>22</sup> Lambert, D., 2008, 'Inconvenient truths', *Geography*, 93(1)

- Clarify what is meant by each subject and practical activity in terms of its distinctive concepts, skills and modes of enquiry, and show how these can be put across in an intellectually respectable way at different levels of understanding<sup>23</sup>. What is not clear from the QCA proposals is what they mean by ‘the key concepts’ of a subject – not the same as the ‘big ideas’.
- Clarify the relationship between subjects and the topics which are to be directly attended to. Subjects (e.g. geography and biology) are often taught through topics, since the subject discipline provides the intellectual tools for understanding the issues.
- Put the critical scrutiny and local development of the curriculum in the hands of the teachers who are knowledgeable about both the students and the subject matter which is relevant to their needs – and alone are in the position to test the general principles.
- Link professional development to curriculum development, recalling the teacher led developments in the former ‘teachers’ centres’.
- Ensure that such curriculum development is shared by the several partners in education – higher education and employers – not as leaders but as contributing partners.
- Ensure that advice to schools and colleges is exactly that, and does not become a further set of prescriptions to be followed and assessed.
- Reappraise the place of assessment for learning as an integral part of curriculum planning. Dependence on high-stakes testing for accountability distorts the curriculum, and prevents teachers developing it.
- Show how, in practice, general principles have been cashed out in terms of resources, organisation and professional development.

### Relevance to 14-19

The current developments 14-19, especially those of the Diploma and of work-based learning, and of the ‘learning pathways’ in Wales, provide an excellent opportunity for rethinking school and college based curriculum development within the different consortia. Indeed, the new diplomas could be examples of a whole curriculum framework, personalised (through the Project and additional/specialist components) to meet the needs of different learners. The new ‘extended diplomas’ particularly are designed in this way because they are intended to cover the whole of the learner’s programme. Furthermore, the Project within the Diploma and the stand-alone Extended project appear to give a lot of freedom to teachers and learners to pursue a topic of the learner’s choice and could provide excellent opportunities for the curriculum development described above.

But several points need to be remembered if this is to happen.

- In the complex world of student learning, different needs and abilities, and different economic and social contexts cannot be adequately captured in any centrally prescribed curriculum.

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<sup>23</sup> See Bruner’s justification for the ‘spiral curriculum’ in which key concepts of a discipline are understood through different modes of representation (*The Process of Education*, 1960, Harvard University Press).

- Teachers (not government or its agencies) must be the central players in that curriculum development, critically scrutinising, and adapting to their contexts, any general principles which come from the centre.
- Designing appropriate assessment of learning must be part of the curriculum development, adapted to the learning (e.g. practical and experiential learning) encouraged for these students in this context.
- Curriculum development (e.g. within the Diplomas in England or within the ‘learning pathways’ in Wales) cannot be disconnected from the practical needs and resources they require, nor from the expertise, skills and knowledge required of the teachers.
- The curriculum development must take place within, and be shaped by, the consortia, not an easy matter where the Diplomas take place over different sites, and involve different specialists and employers. Perhaps there is need to learn from the ‘Teachers Centres’, abolished in the 1980s.
- Since the curriculum is permeated by assumptions about what is worth learning, curriculum development must constantly revisit the question: *What counts as educating this person in this particular social, economic and personal context?*

Rightly conceived, the new Diplomas will succeed but only if they provide the flexible framework within which the teachers can develop the curriculum rather than be a set of prescriptions for the teacher. Lessons must be learnt from Curriculum 2000.

Thinking about the curriculum, as argued in this Issues Paper, is developed further, and illustrated, in subsequent Issues Papers.

The following people have been involved in the production of this Issues Paper: Richard Pring, Eleanor Rawlings, David Egan and Mark Hewlett.

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