

How good
is our school?

SELF-EVALUATION SERIES

Curriculum Flexibility

Curriculum **Flexibility**

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HM Inspectorate of Education

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Contents	page
Introduction	1
Background	1
Emerging Practice	2
Self-Evaluation in Practice	4
Quality Indicators	7
Sources of Support	12
Acknowledgements	13

Introduction

The revised edition of *How good is our school?* (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2002) has been widely welcomed in schools and authorities. This document is one of a series of guides to self-evaluation which build on, but do not repeat, the advice on self-evaluation given in *How good is our school?*.

The introductory publication to the series, *Planning for Improvement*, outlines how you can use the outcomes of self-evaluation to plan effectively for improvement. This guide can be used when you are ready to evaluate the impact of curriculum flexibility in your school. It shows how you can select a cluster of quality indicators (QIs) that focus on key features which have a significant effect on the achievement and experience of pupils.

A more flexible curriculum helps schools to provide learning experiences designed to meet the needs and wishes of each individual pupil, experiences which aim to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to fulfil their full potential.

Curriculum flexibility has an important role to play in supporting all of the Scottish Executive's National Priorities [NPs] for education. Effective, flexible programmes of study will improve motivation and lead to raised attainment [NP1], whilst also equipping pupils with the skills and attitudes to prosper in a changing society [NP5].

Background

Increasing flexibility in the curriculum is a means of improving pupils' overall school experiences and raising their attainment and achievement. The report of the Discipline Task Group published in June 2001 identified an inappropriate curriculum as one of a number of barriers to learning experienced by disaffected young people. It endorsed the use of more appropriate curriculum management to support not only some of the specific needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural problems, but also the needs of a much broader range of pupils who experienced boredom and found school uninspiring.

Learning and Teaching Scotland give the following definition of curriculum flexibility:

Curriculum Flexibility can be defined as the strategies schools and local authorities implement when designing a customised curriculum that:

- takes account of schools' local circumstances;
- recognises the requirements of students;
- meets the needs and expectations of learners; and
- meets the expectations of stakeholders and society in general.

Emerging Practice

Education Authorities and schools are beginning to audit their current curricular provision with a view to increasing its flexibility. As part of this exercise, particular emphasis is being placed on the extent to which the curriculum adequately meets the general and specific needs of all pupils. Some schools are beginning to take advantage of the opportunities suggested within some of the documents and initiatives listed at the end of this guide.

Emerging practice and proposed developments include:

- the disapplication of the modal structure, including the possibility of studying a reduced number of subjects at Standard Grade;
- the possibility of using non age-related groups at specific stages;
- the introduction and development of pre-vocational and vocational taster programmes in S3/S4, possibly in conjunction with further education (FE) colleges;
- introducing Standard Grade at the start of S2 for some or all pupils;
- introducing Standard Grade by December of S2 for some or all pupils;
- introducing Standard Grade at S2 in some subjects;
- certification in S3 at Credit level for the most able pupils;
- the replacement of Standard Grade with National Units and Courses in S3/S4;
- using National Units and Courses in S3 and part of S4, with Intermediate 2/Higher starting in December of S4;
- offering Standard Grade at Foundation level in S3 followed by Intermediate level in S4;

- introducing National Units in S2 for some pupils;
- the introduction of open, flexible and distance learning, possibly in conjunction with institutions of higher education (HE) and FE colleges, and including online learning, school-to-school and school-to-college; and
- use of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to generate ScotCat credits through some study in conjunction with HE institutions.

In order to help you evaluate the quality of the curriculum, five quality indicators have been chosen from the revised edition of *How good is our school?*. They have been selected as those QIs most relevant to curriculum flexibility. They will help you to evaluate:

- the extent to which increased flexibility in the curriculum has led to clearly identified educational gain for pupils, based on a clear rationale and clear objectives;
- the effectiveness of consultation with stakeholders (including parents, teachers and pupils) before proposals were introduced;
- the rigour of the quality assurance arrangements put in place to monitor and evaluate implementation of the proposals;
- communication of the results to the key stakeholders; and
- the effectiveness of the implementation process.

If you are just starting to increase the extent of flexibility in the curriculum you may prefer to use only one or two of the quality indicators to begin with. Schools which have piloted this guide have suggested that QI 1.1 and/or QI 1.2, together with QI 7.3, are the ones with which to start.

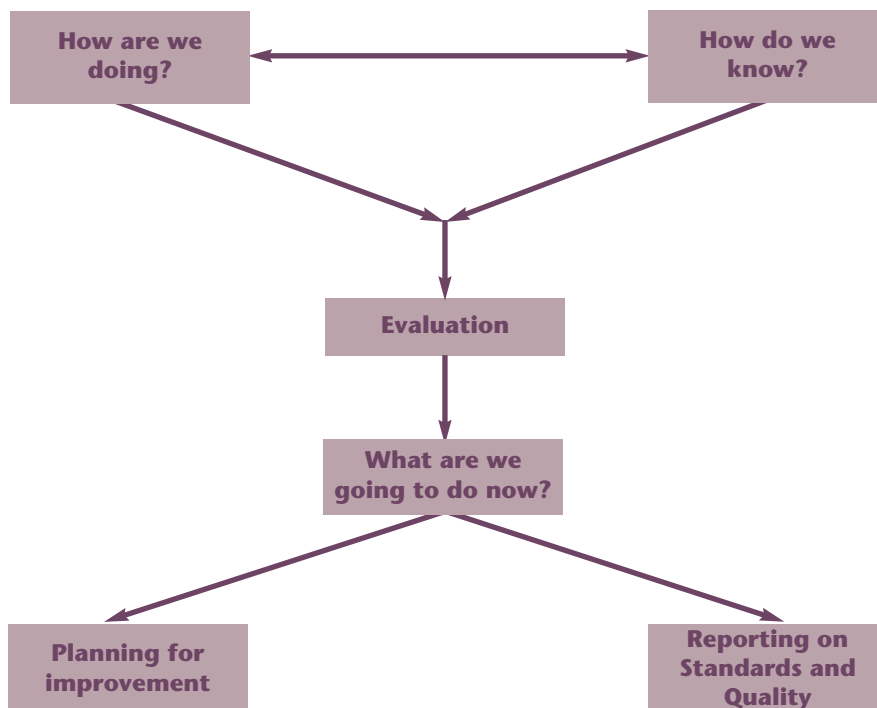
We hope you will find this guide useful in evaluating and developing your policy and practice in providing a more flexible curriculum.

Self-Evaluation in Practice

Part 2 of *How good is our school?* provides all the practical help you need to evaluate the quality of education provided in your school. This guide:

- indicates how increasing the flexibility in the curriculum can contribute to the quality of pupils' experience;
- summarises the key issues relating to curricular flexibility, with references to important sources of advice;
- shows how you might reflect these issues in key questions which derive from the level 4 illustrations of the quality indicators chosen;
- looks at how you might collect evidence from more than one source in order to provide a robust basis for your evaluations; and
- encourages you to weigh up the strengths and areas of improvement in what you observe, in order to come to an overall evaluation of the quality of curricular provision in your school.

You can then use the evaluation and the evidence to plan for improvement and to report on the standards and quality of what you have found.



Using this approach helps you to carry out a quick survey of quality in the area of curriculum flexibility. This guide provides you with formats which you can use as they stand or adapt for your own school. You can also download them as blank proforma from the HMIE web-site [www.hmie.gov.uk].

Use this page alongside pages 15 and 16 of *How good is our school?*.

<p>Note down the sources of evidence on which you are basing your evaluation in the boxes below.</p>
<p>People consulted:</p>
<p>Documentation and resources reviewed:</p>
<p>Direct observation undertaken:</p>
<p>Data analysed:</p>

Fill in your record of the strengths and areas for improvement for each of the quality indicators using the grids on the following pages.

In the box below, note the overall evaluation for each of the quality indicators using the 1-4 scale from How good is our school?.

Quality Indicator	Overall evaluation
1.1	
1.2	
5.4	
7.2	
7.3	

Go back over all the areas for improvement you have identified.

Decide which are your priorities for development.

Identify criteria for success by which to judge progress after you have taken action.

These priorities for curriculum flexibility can now be included in your development plan.

QI: 1.1 Structure of the curriculum

This quality indicator is concerned with the following themes:

- *breadth and balance across elements of the curriculum*
- *integration, permeation*
- *timetabling and arrangements for pupil choice*

Level 4 illustration	Key questions	Evidence	
<p>The curriculum has breadth and balance across its various elements. It has a sound rationale that is clearly focused on achieving the school’s aims. In developing the curriculum, full consideration has been taken of best practice as embodied in national advice and local guidance. Good account has also been taken of parents’ and pupils’ views.</p> <p>There is effective integration of knowledge, skills and understanding. Personal and social capabilities and cross-curricular aspects, including ICT, permeate the curriculum.</p> <p>Timetables enable the curriculum to be offered efficiently, giving appropriate time and emphasis to each curriculum area, subject or mode. There are appropriate opportunities for pupil choice and well planned opportunities for pupils to continue their study of subjects chosen at an earlier stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What account has been taken of national and local guidance in implementing curricular flexibility? • To what extent does the programme reflect the views of parents and pupils? • What evidence is there that improving the flexibility of the curriculum has led to improved attainment and achievement? • To what extent does increasing curricular flexibility increase the opportunities for progression? 	Strengths	Areas for improvement

QI 1.2 Courses and programmes

This quality indicator is concerned with the following themes:

- *breadth, balance and choice*
- *integration, continuity and progression*
- *support and guidance for teachers*

Level 4 illustration	Key questions	Evidence	
		Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p>Courses or programmes have breadth and balance between the various elements. They give full consideration to national and local guidelines, and are fully in keeping with the school's aims. There are appropriate opportunities for pupil choice. Programmes contribute to a continuing interest in learning and self-development.</p> <p>The various elements of the courses or programmes are planned and taught in an appropriate sequence to meet the range of needs, abilities and aspirations of pupils, and to promote progression and continuity in pupil's learning. Productive links are made with other curriculum areas or subjects.</p> <p>Teachers receive comprehensive and helpful guidance on courses and programmes of work, learning and teaching, support for pupils and assessment and recording.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What account has been taken of pupils' and parents' views when developing the programme? • What evidence is there that increased curricular flexibility leads to improvements in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pupil motivation and self-esteem? – attendance and discipline? – vocational preparation? • What provision has been made to train teachers in the new approaches needed to support curriculum flexibility? • How good is the match between the programme and the approaches to assessment? 		

QI 5.4 Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

This quality indicator is concerned with the following themes:

- *encouragement to parents to be involved in their child's learning and the life of the school*
- *procedures for communicating with parents*
- *information given to parents about the work of the school*
- *links between the school and the School Board*
- *the school's role in the local community*

Level 4 illustration	Key questions	Evidence	
		Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p>Parents support, and participate in, the life of the school in a planned and purposeful manner. They are actively encouraged to be partners in their children's learning in a variety of ways, for example, in homework, classroom activities, participation in out-of-school visits and other extra-curricular activities. Positive steps are taken to enable all parents to participate effectively in their children's care and education.</p> <p>The school uses a wide range of effective methods for communicating with parents. These methods take full account of the needs of minority language groups. Parents readily engage with the school concerning its work within a framework of effective two-way communication.</p> <p>Clear, well-presented information about a wide range of aspects of the work of the school, such as the aims, organisation, future developments and levels of achievement is readily available to parents.</p> <p>The headteacher has well-developed links with the School Board. The school actively encourages Board members to be knowledgeable about and involved in, the life of the school and its community. The partnership generates substantial benefits and is valued by all concerned.</p> <p>The school makes a strong contribution to the life of the community and works with it by, for example, participating in events and contributing to the local media. The school mounts a range of events which the community can attend. Where appropriate, it enables members of the community to engage in educational experiences and/or contribute to decision-making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are parents encouraged to participate effectively in discussion about curricular change? • What steps are in place to ensure effective two-way communication with parents, including those from minority language groups? • How clear and well presented is the information issued to parents on the curriculum? • To what extent are the School Board members actively encouraged to be involved in discussions about the curriculum? 		

QI 7.2 Self-evaluation

This quality indicator is concerned with the following themes:

- *processes of self-evaluation*
- *monitoring and evaluation by promoted staff*
- *reporting on standards and quality*

Level 4 illustration	Key questions	Evidence	
		Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p>Staff are fully involved in reflective and systematic self-evaluation which has the explicit purpose of improving the quality of pupils' experiences and standards of attainment. Self-evaluation is rigorous and generates valid and reliable evidence which contributes significantly to procedures for assuring quality. Its results are used effectively to identify priority areas for action. Performance measurement and review take appropriate account of best practice as embodied in local and national guidance. Positive steps are taken to gather the views of parents, pupils and others about the quality of service provided by the school. Effective action is taken in response to these and to other comments. Parents, pupils and others help to identify school strengths, development needs and planning priorities.</p> <p>Promoted staff monitor teachers' plans, evaluate pupils' classroom experiences, track pupils' attainment and evaluate their progress towards meeting agreed targets. Senior managers systematically monitor the effectiveness of school teams. Staff systematically monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the development plan and in meeting agreed targets.</p> <p>Self-evaluation provides valid, comprehensive and reliable evidence for reporting on standards and quality. Arrangements for reporting on standards and quality are based on concise and accurate evaluations of performance across key areas, and clearly convey strengths and areas for improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are all staff involved in the evaluation of curricular initiatives? • How valid and reliable is the evidence on which this evaluation is based? • To what degree have the views of parents, pupils and others helped to inform developments and improvements in curricular provision? • How well is pupils' attainment being tracked to ensure that they are making progress towards meeting their targets? 		

QI 7.3 Planning for improvement

This quality indicator is concerned with the following themes:

- *the development plan*
- *action planning*
- *the impact of planning*

Level 4 illustration	Key questions	Evidence	
		Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p>The development plan is well organised and provides a clear and easy-to-read summary of aims, audit and action. It accurately summarises key strengths, areas for development and progress in achieving previous development priorities. The action section provides a strategy for improvement in key areas over a number of years along with well-chosen annual priority projects. Priorities for development are clearly linked to local and national priorities for education.</p> <p>Related action plans clearly identify how priorities will be implemented and objectives met. Targets within the plan, tasks and timescales are clearly defined and success criteria are specific, measurable and achievable. Resource and staff development requirements are carefully costed.</p> <p>Priorities set in previous plans have been implemented very effectively. Very good progress is being made towards meeting or exceeding current objectives. The implementation of the plans has improved the quality of pupils' experiences and has had a positive impact on maximising attainment. Progress towards implementation is consistent across the school. Staff are fully engaged at each stage of the planning process and are fully committed to the plan. Parents and pupils are consulted and fully aware of the plan's contents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the curricular initiative been based on a rigorous audit of needs? • To what extent have staff, parents, pupils and others been involved in planning the initiative? • What account has been taken of education authority guidance on curriculum flexibility? • Does the proposed curriculum change have a clear action plan with tasks, timescales, success criteria, and resource and staff development requirements? • Does the plan include targets for improved attainment and appropriate measures for improvements in pupils' experience? • To what extent does implementation of the plan improve the quality of pupils' experiences and attainment? 		

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

New Community Schools: The Prospectus, Scottish Office Education Department, 1998

Age and Stage restrictions at Standard and Higher: A consultation paper, Scottish Office Education Department, 1998

Curriculum Design for the Secondary Stages, Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum, 1999

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Future of Education, First Minister's Speech, November 5 2002,
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Education for Citizenship: A paper for Discussion and Development, Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2002

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Educating for Excellence: The Executive's Response to the National Debate, Scottish Executive Education Department, 2003

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www.hmie.gov.uk

www.LTScotland.com/curriculumflexibility

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