Case studies basic education in Europe

A comparative study into the motives, functions, resources, design and implementation of common aims and contents of basic education in Europe.
Core affairs
Scotland

Case studies basic education in Europe
SLO • national institute for curriculum development
SLO is the National institute for curriculum development in the Netherlands. SLO was founded thirty years ago by the Dutch government to give independent, professional advice on, and support for, curriculum innovation, development, and implementation. In performing our tasks, we take into account the developments in society in general, both nationally and internationally, and in education in particular. SLO operates in virtually all sectors of education, including primary education, secondary education, special education, vocational education and teacher education, and covers all subject areas. Our central task is to advise the government on important education reforms and new curricula. SLO supports and coordinates curriculum development in collaboration with schools and universities, carries out curriculum evaluations, and provides information about teaching materials.
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1. Introduction: objectives of the study and research methods used

Since 2002, a new curriculum has been in development in Scotland for the age group 3 - 18. This major initiative was not triggered by any lack in quality of the current system, but by the desire to make education more future-oriented and coherent, and in order to raise both its efficiency and effectiveness.

The developing curriculum and the initiative itself, as well as the implementation process, contain features that might be of interest to other educational systems. It was for this reason that the SLO conducted a case study on this Scottish initiative.

The most important characteristics of the Scottish approach are that:
- The total curriculum from the age of 3 to the age of 18 is being revised on the basis of four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
- The Scottish government has commissioned four national partners - Learning and Teaching Scotland, The Scottish Government, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and The Scottish Qualifications Authority - to come up with a joint approach.
- An important starting point was to ensure the involvement and ‘engagement’ of the schools (teachers and headteachers).
- In addition to a curriculum revision there have been other national developments aimed at securing material improvements to school education including enhanced salaries, more systematic professional development and a major overhaul of school buildings.

This paper discusses the steps that the Curriculum for Excellence initiative has taken, from the initial analysis and review, to the nature of the curriculum, the development process, and the implementation strategy. The case study is concluded with some points of discussion and a number of questions concerning future developments.
2. Background project ‘Core Affairs’

The SLO has a number of ‘knowledge circles’ in which SLO staff, in collaboration with a small number of external experts, carry out studies into curriculum issues in the medium term. One of these ‘knowledge circles’ is concerned with the Core of Content. This involves an international comparative study called ‘Core Affairs’ which looks into the motives, sources, design and implementation of core objectives and core content within basic education in Europe (from the age of 3/4 to the age of 14/15). This is being done on the basis of a series of case studies, after which a cross analysis will be made. The present case study about the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence is a part of the broader study. However, in itself, this case study also provides the SLO ‘knowledge circle’ with added value.

SLO’s main objectives for the major comparative study are: to gain insight into the ways in which the process of educational and curriculum development may be improved; to find out what future curricula might look like; and to identify which factors could positively influence implementation strategies. In this way, the SLO intends to enhance its insight into the nature of curriculum policy and practice.
3. A wide-ranging case

Studying change in education is a complex matter. Often, many years go by between the identification of reasons that point to a need for curriculum reformation, the policy decision to initiate curriculum renewal and the actual implementation of the reforms. And in that time the external factors that triggered the development in the first place might well have themselves changed. In addition, other planned and unplanned business, not least political and administrative forces get in the way of the carefully planned development schedule.

For this case study, SLO applied a combination of literature studies, including internet-search actions, and a series of interviews with people who are either directly or indirectly involved. Out of this methodology the following questions were raised:

• What preceded Curriculum for Excellence?
• What were the reasons behind drawing up of a new curriculum for young people aged 3 to 18?
• What is expected of the new curriculum?
• What are the core objectives of the new curriculum?
• What stakeholders played a part in the realisation of the new curriculum?
• What was the implementation strategy that was followed?
• What part did ICT play during the implementation process?
• What are the lessons to be learned concerning the situation in the Netherlands?
4. The start: a political initiative

In 2000, a new act was passed: the Standards in Scotland’s Schools Etc. Act 2000. In the Act, a set of broad national priorities for education were laid down. The priorities are:

1. achievements and attainment
2. a framework for learning
3. inclusion and equality
4. values and citizenship
5. learning for life.

As a result of these, all school authorities in Scotland were committed to giving particular attention to the business of educational improvement.

The Scottish government realised that, while the existing educational system in Scotland still met with current quality standards, it was insufficiently matched to the requirements that will be made of future citizens. In fact, there was a real sense of urgency in asking the question: would the type of education, developed in the twentieth century, be able to adequately support the economic development of Scotland in the twenty-first century? In other words: would the existing education system be able to sufficiently prepare Scottish citizens for the new services and roles required of them in the future knowledge economy? This answer to this question was clear: change to the educational system was needed to prepare young people better for life and work in the 21st century.

Curriculum for Excellence should not be seen as the only major change impacting on the Scottish system in the recent past. In 2001, the salaries and terms of employment of Scotland’s teachers were reviewed. The Scottish government also put in place at that same time, a major programme of school building aimed at the renovation and improvement of the nation’s school buildings. Within this major programme – the Building Excellence programme - the objective is to have across Scotland 300 first-class school buildings by 2009. Changes to teachers’ terms of employment included: enhanced standards for teacher registration; a guarantee of full time employment for one year for all newly qualified teachers; the opportunity for experienced teachers to study to become Chartered Teachers, with a consequent increase in salary; 35 hours of continuing professional development per year for each teacher; arrangements to allow for career changes; and clearly defined roles for teachers and supporting staff.

Prior to any decisions on the exact nature of curriculum reformation, a National Debate took place between March and June 2002. This marked the first major action by the newly installed Scottish Parliament, a devolved government within the United Kingdom. This new political zest certainly contributed to a commitment to collaborative approaches to educational reformation. One person interviewed, described it as follows:

‘It was a new Parliament, a new Millennium, and the desire to make education, education and education the focus of policy-making and the core of that policy was on inclusion. It was not that the system was broken and needed fixing. It was about looking at an education strategy for the 21st century. It was also the first time since WWII that the whole of the statutory system was looked at as a whole.’

Another person interviewed mentioned that, in addition to the future perspective and the major goal of ‘inclusion’, the issues of; disinterested 15-year olds and the resulting levels of indiscipline and drop-out; the poor matching of curriculum expectations to the legitimate interests of young people; a desire to integrate early childhood education into the total curriculum, and a reduction in the disproportionate importance attached to national examination results, were also matters that have been given priority.

One individual interviewed as part of the SLO case study argued that the education system in Scotland was founded on a well established set of Scottish values: wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity, which are inscribed on the mace in the Scottish Parliament.

The objective of the National Debate was to create shared values for Scottish education. All 32 education authorities (EAs) and all independent (private) schools engaged in discussions concerning the nature and purposes of the curriculum. During these sessions, the merits and demerits of the existing curriculum were discussed, as well as a wide range of desired changes. Between October and December 2002, the Scottish government reflected on the results of this debate and in January 2003, the Scottish Minister of Education presented a reaction in which he endorsed the conclusions of the National Debate (Scottish Executive, 2003).

The conclusions identified a number of points for improvement including:
• Increasing the curriculum choices for pupils;
• Reducing the complexity and the number of assessments;
• Improving literacy and numeracy skills
• Preparing young people for work
• Reduction of class size and other pupil-teacher ratios - particularly for mathematics, English, and at certain stages of schooling;
• Dealing with behavioural problems and bullying;
• Allowing headteachers more control of budgets;
• Having teachers qualified to work in both primary and secondary schools;
• Improving the quality and standard of school buildings;
• Involving parents more;
• Reforming the role of the inspectorate.

Broadening
From the National Debate, it becomes clear that there was a significant desire for a greater focus on the skills for life\textsuperscript{1} and needs-assessments to be used to provide pupils with feedback, rather than a mere ritual of passing or failing of tests. From the National Debate, it also became clear that, as a result of changing patterns of parental employment, parents had trouble in meeting the level of involvement with the school that was expected of them. Participants in the National Debate expected that the role schools would play in young people’s education would change with a greater emphasis on the concept of the New Community School\textsuperscript{2} where school buildings would remain open for longer hours allowing a more varied menu of educational opportunities. From the National Debate, it became clear that what was required was a type of education that is more centred on the community, which takes greater account of the needs of parents and pupils into account, and not an island isolated from those it serves in a rapidly changing society. The Scottish government in 2006 (Scottish Executive, 2006b) identified the educational value in utilising pupils’ personal interests through various types of clubs, in the community, and in charity and fund-raising organisations. Many of these activities take place as a continuation of the school day, either starting during school or immediately after, or continuing after school. Although these activities have been historically seen as extra-curricular, they play a major part in the child’s individual growth, development and performance.

\textsuperscript{1}We are inclined to interpret these as social competences; however, this is rather too limited an approach, because these may be confused with the Dutch meaning of social competences. ‘Skills for life’ is a much broader concept.

\textsuperscript{2}With ‘a different role’ we are referring to the broader range of responsibilities that is applied by community schools (in the Netherlands called ‘brede scholen’). These not only concern the basic skills of arithmetic, language and the basic subjects, but also: parents’ involvement, early involvement of young children in language projects, after-school activities, care duties, collaboration with institutions in the neighbourhood, and being a community centre.
5. What were the reasons behind the design of a new curriculum for the ages 3 - 18?

The report of the National Debate was followed by the Ministerial Response (2003). The action that followed was the setting up of the Curriculum Review Group. This group made a proposal concerning the core objectives of Curriculum for Excellence (2004a). These proposals are based upon a study by the Scottish Council for Research in Education and curriculum examples of various countries ‘from Norway to Tasmania’ as one of the interviewees put it. Especially, the Australian provinces of Victoria and Queensland provided much inspiration. Another Ministerial Response (2004b) followed. These documents, which were published in combination, formed the basis - in a formal and content-oriented way - for the further educational developments in Scotland.

The Review Group gave three reasons for the need for curriculum change:
1. Social developments: global, political, economic and cultural changes; the urgent need to raise Scotland’s economic performance; the handling of increasing diversity in society; improving Scotland’s health; and the reduction of poverty.
2. Changes within education itself: the influence of ICT; the school’s role as a parent partner, a partner to other service providers and a partner to the community as a whole.
3. Growing awareness that a significant part of the Scottish population was not performing according to their abilities; a situation that was likely to get worse before getting better, leading to socio-economic problems.

Towards a coherent curriculum
In Scotland, there are curriculum guidelines for the age group 3 - 5, another set for those aged 5 - 14, and a complicated national qualification structure with high-stakes external examinations in each of Secondary Four, Five and Six. These have all been carefully developed, but in some respects separately from each other. In order to prepare children for their future in an optimum way, the Review Group intended to develop a curriculum that was less overloaded, offered more continuity and a wider choice of options. Most of all, school should become a more enjoyable part of children’s lives. Education for the age group of 3 to 5, while not compulsory, has high priority among parents and others and has, therefore, been included in the reformation. The emphasis of the curriculum for the ages 5 - 14 currently
lies rather too much on the 15-18 qualifications. Moreover, the current curriculum contains duplication and inconsistencies, which are being challenged or removed by the Review Group. In addition, more emphasis will be placed on experience-based learning, involving the learner in a more active way. Contexts for learning will include more local events and the particular circumstances of the school and its community.

Interlude: evaluation of the former 5-14 National Guidelines

The creation of the 5-14 National Guidelines in the nineteen eighties was a major revolution in curriculum design in Scotland. Through its original identification of five key learning areas – English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Expressive Arts, and Religious Education – the 5-14 Programme established the foundations for a reformation and rejuvenation of the curriculum from Primary 1 (P1) to Secondary 2 (S2) which had been previously defined in only the broadest terms.

The 1987 paper Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: A Policy for the 1990s (SEED) detailed several concerns regarding the educational provision for primary and lower secondary pupils throughout Scotland, stated that ‘the Government’s main aim is to secure substantial improvements in the quality and level of achievement of school education in Scotland’ (1987:4). The report also highlighted the lack of continuity between primary and early secondary education, poor definition of curriculum and assessment, and inadequate communication with parents. Adams (1994:4) considered that it was the lack of a shared consensus that created ‘a barrier to understanding of what goes on in primary school and to communicating with parents and secondary schools’.

These concerns were to be addressed through a set of National Curriculum Guidelines, not a statutory curriculum, for Scottish schools. These would provide a set of practical guidelines for teaching and assessment, thus securing a national consensus on what children should know and be able to do while retaining an element of flexibility with regard to lesson content and pedagogy. The guidance was based on the mantra of breadth, balance, continuity, coherence and progression and was to an extent supportive of a whole-school and the cross-curricular approach to learning.

The years between the identification of the problems and the implementation of the 5-14 curriculum in 1991 were spent consulting and reviewing with practitioners across the country before the publication of the National Guidelines. Pupils between P1 and S2 would now work
across a scale ranging from Level A to Level E. In 1999, a further Level F was introduced for pupils who had achieved Level E before the end of S2. The introduction of these National Guidelines provided practitioners with significant challenges nationwide. In the early stages of 5-14, one of the key problems encountered regarded the absence of guidance on implementation, something which Harlen (1995:1) considers was due to ‘the arrival of further guidelines (Environmental Studies, Expressive Arts, and Religious and Moral Education) while schools were coming to grips with the first ones (English Language and Mathematics)’ causing teachers to feel ‘under some pressure’. This provides an indication of perceptions of the consultation and review processes that were undertaken. It was not until the publication of 5-14: A Practical Guide for Teachers in Primary and Secondary School (SOED), in 1994, that implementation advice was introduced. It might be reasonably asserted that 5-14 in its entirety has never been fully implemented across the years 5 to 14, and certainly not in secondary schools, where it was generally seen as essentially a primary school initiative.

The implications and impact of Curriculum for Excellence (Curriculum for Excellence) will, however, be much wider than 5-14. It will, inter alia, challenge teachers and those involved in education to approach the curriculum in new ways. It will have implications for the organisation of the curriculum in school and other places of learning. It will impact on teaching and non-teaching staff as it strives to give proper recognition of pupil achievement rather than focusing purely on pupil attainment.
6. What is required of the new curriculum?

The discussions that took place around Curriculum for Excellence, and which had already been started up during the National Debate, made it clear that there were both elements worth keeping and aspects requiring renewal.

Aspects from the old curriculum that are considered worth keeping, particularly from the perspective of educational practice, include:

- The flexibility of the Scottish system
- The combination of breadth and depth of the curriculum
- The high quality of teachers and teaching
- The quality of teaching material supporting teachers’ efforts
- The comprehensive principle (a school that does not select pupils by ability, and which differentiates teaching on the basis of pupils’ individual learning needs).

Proposed changes include:

- Making learning more attractive, more challenging and more fun;
- Reducing the ‘overcrowding’ of the curriculum;
- Improving the continuity between the different stages of the curriculum from the age of 3 to the age of 18;
- Creating a better balance between general and vocational skills and involving a broader range of experiences;
- Providing young people with the skills they will need on tomorrow’s job market;
- Making sure that assessments and examinations are used to support learning;
- Providing a wider choice of options to meet young people’s needs and aspirations.
7. The heart of the new curriculum

Curriculum for Excellence is aimed at a broader definition of ‘how’ and ‘what’ young people should learn; it also concerns the recognition of a wider variety of experiences and achievements. The processes of effective learning and teaching are at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2006, p. 1). One of the members of the curriculum design group interviewed describes Curriculum for Excellence as follows:

‘It is challenging, but refreshingly so. It meets the aspirations of learners, teachers and stakeholders. It puts deeper learning before surface learning; it focuses on learning for life, not just learning for exams; it trusts teachers’ professionalism and puts pedagogy at the heart of the matter.’

Curriculum for Excellence identifies four purposes of the curriculum. Each purpose is intended to enable all young people to become: successful learners\(^3\), confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The diagram below provides more detail of each of these capacities.

The new curriculum also includes objectives that are aimed more at the young person’s social functioning, the development of personal competences, and becoming a competent Scottish citizen. In addition, the shifting economic situation - from a service-oriented economy towards a knowledge economy - calls for the inclusion of social, creative and entrepreneurial competences.

\(^3\) Explicit use of the term ‘learners’ is made here. It is an active form for ‘those who learn’. This term was very specifically chosen, rather than ‘pupils’. This choice is comparable to the shift that is noticeable in the Netherlands from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’.
**Purposes of the curriculum 3-18**

**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 well-being
- 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 make informed decisions
- achieve success in different areas of activity

**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

To enable all young people to become
As well as a list of skills and attributes, the following principles of curriculum design were agreed upon for the new curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2004a, p. 14/15):
1. Challenge and enjoyment (learning should be challenging, motivating and involved; the curriculum should encourage high ambitions and aspirations).
2. Breadth (all children receive a wide variety of experiences).
3. Progression (it is essential to create a continuous line, in which each stage is built upon the previous one).
4. Depth (children must be given the opportunity to develop their full potential).
5. Personalisation and choice (to fulfil the pupils’ individual needs and talents, the curriculum should meet their individual choices and wishes).
6. Coherence (the pupils’ learning experiences should form a coherent whole).
7. Relevance (young people should understand the objective of their learning activities).
8. Stakeholders

Various stakeholders have been involved in the different activities that helped develop Curriculum for Excellence. During the National Debate - the broad discussion in 2002 - the many stakeholders included parents, teachers, employers, pupils and others. Many local school communities hosted discussion meetings to which all were invited.

In November 2003, the Minister of Education set up the Review Group. The Review Group comprised 19 persons, who represented a range of different organisations. The composition of the group was very diverse. In addition to the main professional institutions, such as Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Inspectorate, school boards, universities, teacher and headteacher representatives were important partners. Young people and parents’ representatives were not included at this preliminary stage; their involvement came later.

In 2006, the Curriculum Review Programme Board published ‘Progress and Proposals’. In this document, the outcomes were reviewed and a number of future activities discussed. The Curriculum Review Programme Board comprised ten persons. Here, also, the official institutes were well represented, including Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Inspectorate, universities and SQA. Three headteachers were also members of this group.

Next to these national committees, great importance was attached to the engagement of teachers in discussion of and reflection on Curriculum for Excellence in their own school. In the calendar surveys, the roles of ‘the school’ and the ‘Curriculum for Excellence programme’ are distinguished.

The Year of Engagement

While the change process was started with a National Debate and the formation of high-level national committees, the initiative was based on the core idea of a shared enterprise, in which as many people as possible should become involved. This required a particular focus on engagement and thus the creation of the ‘Year of Engagement’ which has since become a permanent feature of Curriculum for Excellence.
The role of the curriculum institute
Scotland’s national curriculum institute, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) (www.ltscotland.org.uk), was developed out of a merger between the Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET) and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC). LTS considers its most important objectives to be:

• Active promotion of educational innovation;
• Contributing to the ambition and quality (‘excellence’) of the Scottish educational system;
• Supporting teachers, schools and the local authorities in their efforts to improve the quality of education and its outcomes;
• Ensuring that the curriculum and the educational learning process, including the use of ICT, contribute to the optimum development of children and young people.

LTS operates on the basis of five values:

**Integrity**: Being honest, fulfilling commitments and accepting responsibility.

**Respect**: Working with each other in a spirit of equality, openness and trust.

**Creativity**: Embracing innovation, change and forward thinking.

**Leadership**: Inspiring one another to achieve the LTS vision.

**Excellence**: Encouraging and exemplifying the highest standards.

The institute employs around 200 people, many of whom (50) are specialists in ICT specifically aimed at the application of ICT for the purpose of curricular activities. This involves maintenance and updating of the LTS website, making LTS products accessible online, organising digital consultancies, and producing digital newsletters. In addition, LTS has responsibility for a digital learning environment specifically designed for the Scottish educational system (GLOW).

As far as curriculum development is concerned, LTS aims to broaden this concept from curriculum design to curriculum architecture. The latter term, curriculum architecture, being a broader concept than curriculum design in that it includes management, didactics and pedagogics. The concept is particularly used in relation to educational innovation within schools.

LTS plays a central role in all phases of the educational development process. The institute is close to government and has the necessary capacity (people, networks, communication means) to perform this central role.
9. Evidence-based implementation?

In Scottish government documentation, a clear stand opposing the Research Development Diffusion (RDD) implementation approach is taken (2006b, p. 4). Curriculum for Excellence is considered to be a cultural change. The focus therefore lies in the engagement of teachers reflecting upon the principles of their educational objectives and values and their class-room practices. The term ‘engagement’ thus comprises a complete package of structures and interventions in order to involve as many people as possible in the process. Engagement represents an important spearhead in the implementation strategy. The process is ‘evidence-based’, involving the sharing and development of ideas by reflective practitioners. From the newsletter published in the autumn of 2006: ‘This means that teachers will be thinking, contributing, debating, questioning, affirming, sharing, and planning for action together, rather than passively taking in information from a series of presentations’. A point of note: at the end of the discussion, every teacher involved received a ‘goody bag’ with two books about effective learning and a USB stick with 80 useful sources and websites. Christie and Boyd (sa) emphasised that the renewal of the curriculum for the age group 3 - 18 should be in keeping with the focus on ‘teacher as learner’: in other words, the teachers’ knowledge and understanding, underlying values, and autonomous capacity.

The implementation process for Curriculum for Excellence is carried out in close consultation by the following parties: Scottish Government, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), schools and school boards, colleges, and researchers. HMIE plays a double role in that it, the inspectorate, gives advice on a national level on the one hand, and advice to schools about Curriculum for Excellence on the other. In addition, HMIE exerts pressure on schools to start up the discussion on Curriculum for Excellence. From June of 2005, schools were able to put their names down in a register of interest. In this way, information is obtained about the level of commitment of schools to the reform programme. The whole approach is founded on joint action, rather than enforced change. Different

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4 Here, the term evidence-based is interpreted in a different way from the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, evidence-based is understood to mean that a method has been scientifically researched and that its effects have been demonstrated. In Scotland, however, it concerns the proven value of a certain method from the teacher’s perspective: the professionalism and expertise (concerning an approach) is passed onto the teacher.
reforms take place simultaneously, not only regarding content, but also at a governmental level, e.g. concerning the financial autonomy of schools.

Stimulation and facilitation
The Curriculum for Excellence implementation is a carefully concerted operation, which, on the one hand, makes great demands on teachers and headteachers, while on the other it offers considerable resources, such as professional development and refresher courses, new ICT, new buildings and school-leadership training. The Curriculum for Excellence documentation focuses intensively on the known (effective) factors for school improvement, such as school leadership, the role played by assessment and testing and high levels of ambition and expectation. School leadership plays an especially important part in the implementation of the new curriculum. As a result, in 2005 a Leadership Academy was founded, more opportunities for senior staff training are created, and mentoring and coaching programmes for headteachers were introduced (2005). More opportunities for refresher courses were created for the teachers, including combined trainings for teachers, social workers, health-care professionals and others in the local community.

Further detailing of Curriculum for Excellence
After the publication of Curriculum for Excellence (2004a) by the Review Group, which contained proposals concerning the arrangement and innovation of the new curriculum, a Ministerial response (2004b) was issued. Next, a programme providing detail on the initiative was put in place. A programme board was convened to advise Ministers and give direction to the programme. Within the overall initiative arrange of activities were planned to support the development of the new educational vision. Task Groups were set up for eight curriculum areas:
- Science
- Languages
- Social studies
- Mathematics
- Technology
- Expressive arts
- Health and wellbeing
- Religious and moral education.

The Task Groups’ main focus was the 3 - 15 age range; however, the 15 - 18 range was also carefully kept in mind.
To first task of the groups was to compare the existing curriculum with the values and objectives of Curriculum for Excellence. After that initial analysis, recommendations were given concerning reform, prioritisation, simplification of learning outcomes, and overall reduction of the curriculum content load.

The Task Groups concluded their first job in December 2005. The groups agreed that simplification and prioritisation were possible and that these concern both the how and the what of learning and teaching. Furthermore, they agreed that the proposals had to be supported by a systematic programme of continuing professional development for teachers and, also, that formative assessment should support the curriculum changes. During the next phase of the Task Groups’ work, detailed proposals for revised curriculum specification were made.

The results of these have been included in Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 1 and 2’ (2006a and 2007). In these two contributions, an indication is given of what Curriculum for Excellence will mean for each subject or group of subjects, and in what ways the four capacities can be applied (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors to society). In the curriculum guidelines, the amount of detail varies with language and mathematics containing most detail. The optimum level of curriculum detail has not yet been determined.

In part 2 of ‘Building the Curriculum’ active learning is explicitly discussed. The focus here lies on the attitude of the teacher. In the document, a number of reflective questions are put to teachers, in order to have them reflect upon their own practice and join in a collaborative discussion about ways in which learners can be engaged and challenged in their learning.
An example: Modern Languages

The first concepts have been published for this learning area. The curriculum document starts with ‘Overarching experiences’, such as:
Through my learning of a new language I gain deeper understanding of my first language and appreciate the richness and interconnected nature of languages.

Next, a number of objectives concerning sub-aspects of the learning area are worked out in detail for three stages. The objectives are described as ‘I can’ statements and ‘I have’ statements, such as:
• Domain: Reading to Appreciate Other Cultures: I have worked with others to read and research texts in the language I am learning
• Domain: Finding and Using Information: Using a variety of resources, I can independently read texts that are more detailed and which contain complex language, including a range of tenses, and demonstrate my understanding

Progress and proposals

In 2006, ‘Progress and Proposals’ (2006b) was published by the Curriculum Review Programme Board. In it, the development to date was evaluated and future directions discussed.

For example, an achievement framework was proposed. Within this framework, the period from the age of 3 up to the age of 18 is divided into six levels (2006b, p. 13). The moment teachers are challenged to reflect upon ways of learning, the risk of losing a certain goal-orientedness and result-orientedness as far as learning is concerned, appears. Moreover, Curriculum for Excellence addresses the age group 3 - 18 and within this range it is important to include a number of ‘assessment moments’. The particular points at which these assessment moments occur in Curriculum for Excellence is indicated and differ from those in the previous curriculum plan.
The table below indicates, for each of the six levels, the points in time at which certain levels of experience and outcomes are expected of learners.
Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) supports the implementation by means of a dedicated website, toolkits for reflection for staff and parents, focus groups and workshops. An important element of the implementation strategy is the setting of clear objectives for all parties involved. Additionally, and most importantly, individual schools have a degree of flexibility as to the implementation of the curriculum.

During the period 2005 - 2007, six Curriculum for Excellence newsletters were published. In the newsletter published in the autumn of 2005, schools were encouraged to use the LTS ‘Starter Kit’ to ‘kick off’ the Curriculum for Excellence development process. On planning for 2006, the newsletter stated that the draft version of the curriculum (the curriculum architecture) should be discussed at school staff meetings, in focus groups and during seminars from September 2006 onwards. In the autumn of 2007, another major, Scotland-wide discussion round was organised in order to give teachers further opportunity to reflect upon and express views on the new curriculum.

In January 2008, the trialling process began in schools. During 2008/2009, the curriculum will be further refined, with further familiarisation of the new curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2006b, p. 25) taking place from August 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Experiences and outcomes for most children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td>In preschools and group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>At the end of P4; sooner for some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>At the end of P7; sooner for some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>In S1-S3; sooner for some.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Fourth level corresponds to SCQF level 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>In S4-S6; sooner for some.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Assessment and qualifications

As has been said, different Task Groups were set up for the different parts and aspects of the curriculum. One of these was the Assessment and Qualifications Task Group. The task here was to provide a new structure and design of qualifications, assessment methods and quality control. The Task Group also engaged in extensive discussions with many different stakeholders (young people, parents and guardians, schools and local communities, trainers, and job-market sectors). The outcomes of these discussions included:

- An acknowledgement that changes to the qualification structure have to be based upon the new curriculum.
- Fewer external assessments should take place; however, no clear statement was made as to the ideal balance between internal and external testing.
- The attainments of the current system while important fail to take adequate account of the professionalism of teachers and local circumstances vis a vis flexibility.
- The workload implications of Curriculum for Excellence on teachers should be taken into account.

Newsletter 6 Curriculum for Excellence, Summer 2007, p. 5

A separate programme carried out in a significant number of pilot schools (starting in some cases in 2002) is the Assessment is for Learning programme. Black and William describe assessment as ‘all those activities, undertaken by teachers and/or pupils that provide information to be used as feedback in order to change the teaching and learning practice’.

Assessment is for Learning is described as a ‘whole school approach’.

The key idea behind Assessment is for Learning is that assessment is used to improve the outcomes of learning and the learning processes. Therefore, the starting points are that pupils:

- understand why they are learning something;
- are given feedback about the quality of their work and how they might improve it;
- are given advice about improvements;
- are fully involved in the choice of their next step and who may be able to help them take it.
In the basic scheme of the project, three principles of the Assessment is for Learning are worked out in further detail.

- Firstly, assessment as a subject of learning (Assessment as learning) - for example by together deciding what knowledge should be acquired.
- Secondly, assessment in order to learn (Assessment for learning) - for example: pupils reflect and give feedback on the knowledge acquired and carry out a self-evaluation.
- Thirdly, the actual assessment of the knowledge acquired (Assessment of learning).

In fact, Assessment is for Learning concerns the question of how the learner can set learning targets and assess these together with teachers and other learners. In this way, the setting, measuring and attainment of learning objectives becomes a central aspect of the learning process. Deciding on clear targets, giving feedback and critical reflection also become part of the process.

The subtitle of Assessment is for Learning is ‘a quiet revolution in Scottish Education’ (quotation by Peter Peacock, then Scottish Minister of Education, 2005); it indicates that the application of Assessment is for Learning principles could revolutionise the nature of learning and teaching in the classroom.

However, there is a serious impediment to the effective implementation of Assessment is for Learning. In Scotland, external examinations set by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) have an almost sacred status in the last three years of secondary education. Consequently, much of the teaching is focused on success in these examinations and it will be quite a challenge to integrate the principles of formative assessment that characterise Assessment is for Learning into the context of external summative assessment.
11. A major role for ICT

In different ways, ICT plays an important part in the development and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence:

- as a platform for action and exchange

  The national website, which was designed and is maintained by LTS, was used to publish documents and exchange views. This nation-wide website played an important part in the National Debate. In all Curriculum for Excellence newsletters and folders, the central platform www.acurriculumforexcellence.co.uk is referred to. Between 8 December 2006 and 26 January 2007, teachers participated in an on-line debate, while internationally recognised educationalists including Michael Fullan and Terry Dozier published articles on the website.

- to promote and consolidate the use of ICT in schools

  While for some time considerable attention has been given to encouraging the use of ICT in Scottish schools, the application of ICT and use of the internet in schools is not yet optimal. The development and implementation strategies for Curriculum for Excellence use integrated applications of ICT as symbolic of the modernisation of education.

The Scottish government regards the use of ICT as an essential in educational development. It is a powerful tool capable of changing the nature and effectiveness of learning and teaching. While more is still to be done, considerable progress has been achieved in facilitating the use of ICT by schools and learners: each student in Scotland now has access to high quality ICT facilities and all schools have high speed Internet connections. Improvement of communications by means of the Scottish Schools Digital Network (SSDN) and broadband initiatives continues to be supported by the Scottish government.

The SSDN is now promoted under a new branding as GLOW. At the Scottish Learning Festival (19-20 September 2007), teachers were able to test the nation-wide network. The network comprises teaching and course materials, schedules and feedback (chats, groups, i-conferencing). GLOW now connects over 800,000 teachers and pupils. There is no other country with a similar nation-wide network. While GLOW is a resource for all aspects of Scottish school education, it is seen as a key factor in supporting the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.
The Scottish Inspectorate published in 2007 a report on the use of ICT in education. Among other things, this report pointed out that, in some schools, computers were still concentrated in particular subject classes. However, the desirable objective is where computers are used naturally in all learning situations and in every classroom.

Although over the past number of years considerable investment has been made in the area of ICT, especially in the infrastructure, there are still points for improvement, such as the didactic management of pupils using digital content, enhancing the confidence and competences of teaching staff, and the provision of technical support.
12. What lessons can be learned concerning the situation in the Netherlands?

The Scottish government has demonstrated great ambition in the development and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. As has been shown, it is clearly more than just a new curriculum. It connects with initiatives on new school building, enhanced ICT support, better terms of teacher employment, a national commitment to systematic and sustained professional development opportunities for all teachers. The implementation of the change process is strongly focussed upon teachers and their engagement in the reform programme.

The analysis of the educational situation, the reasons for the need for change and the new educational objectives seen in Scotland show marked similarities with discussions held concerning Dutch educational reform. For example; in both countries students are the focal point; more relevant and stimulating perceptions of education are needed; the education system must be better aimed at future societies and job markets; the curriculum must become more coherent and continuous; it must be less overloaded and repetitious; there should be more recognition of teachers’ professional expertise; and more flexibility for schools in how they plan and deliver learning and teaching programmes.

In Scotland, through the Curriculum for Excellence programme, these issues have been addressed. For example:

1) The curriculum is regarded as a continuum running from 3 to 18, rather than a series of stages; early education, primary education, lower secondary and upper secondary. This involved a returning to the basic question: what will be expected of future citizens and in what ways does education contribute to this?

2) Prior to the National Debate and the development of the new curriculum, it is arguable that a number of strategic policy commitments helped prepare the ground for Curriculum for Excellence. Teachers’ salaries and terms of employment were enhanced; a national drive to significantly enhance the quality of school buildings was put in place; a continuing priority given to further enhancement of ICT infrastructure and classroom use. All this seems to indicate a government willingness to invest in the conditions needed if significant system change is to be achieved.

3) Across the board, stakeholders were involved (the process of engagement). It involves more than what in Dutch is called call “draagvlak” (social support). Very considerable effort and attention were invested in this key principle.
4) The entire educational infrastructure was stimulated in order to increase the likelihood of Curriculum for Excellence becoming a success story. The Scottish curricular institute, Learning and Teaching Scotland, plays an important central role in the development and implementation processes.

5) A carefully thought-out strategy was devised and followed. This focussed on involving as many stakeholders as possible, while at the same time ensuring the government’s objectives were always in focus. Moreover, it was recognised at the outset that a significant period of time would be required for effective, system-wide implementation.

6) Scotland has a comprehensive school system, in which pupils are not distributed across educational sectors according to their ability. In addition, there was an existing curriculum for the age group 5 - 14. This makes the educational system relatively transparent. In the Netherlands, this concept, linking the intermediate school and basic education, has never really taken root and has essentially disappeared from the picture.
13. What does this imply for the curricular policy?

Although in Scotland Curriculum for Excellence is a long-term, well thought-out strategy, in which a variety of stakeholders including teachers and education boards were directly involved in order to ensure widespread engagement, it cannot yet be determined on the basis of the documentation whether or not this strategy will prove to be successful. Evaluation evidence will help make that determination in due course.

But one concern is that, while there has been significant effort placed on a collaborative approach to the development programme, government documents (and the analysis done prior to this paper) failed to identify any plans for open evaluation and reflection on the process and its outcomes. The texts published by the Scottish Executive are written in an upbeat, encouraging tone, as we have come to expect from any government’s texts.

On the basis of experience and the literature (e.g. Fullan), we may presuppose that this open approach befits present society. It is no longer appropriate to have a single institution, in consultation with the government, determine what learners should and should not learn. People are better educated than ever and their involvement in the setting of agendas and decision-making processes will broaden social support for implementation. Moreover, it is clear that the public is not satisfied with the ways in which politics are used to dictate educational and other social policy changes.

In addition to the RDD approach, two new approaches have been developed. Nelissen (2003) distinguishes three approaches of innovation and implementation. The ‘top-down’ approach is the most recognisable in the RDD approach. The opposite is the ‘bottom-up’ approach, whereby innovations are initiated by schools and institutions. The first model has more or less been disposed of, because it rarely matched the views from the field. The ‘bottom-up’ model is not desirable either, because the autonomous school is sometimes inclined to screen off information concerning content. A hybrid of the two models is considered more attractive, with a concern for developmental research, carried out, for example by ‘knowledge communities. Current thinking about educational innovation and implementation is embodied in the term reculturing (Hargreaves and Fink, 2000; Fullan, 2000). This presupposes an involved and learning community.
In addition, Fullan indicates that change should occur in different dimensions simultaneously, i.e.:

- New materials, including curricula, learning lines, and manuals.
- New approaches (didactics, theory about learning processes).
- New beliefs, ideas, theories, views.

Especially this last category should not be underrated; it concerns the emotional side of reformation.

All this implies that national institutes for curriculum development should focus more on facilitating the dialogue and the construction process that will lead to curriculum development and implementation. The process involves interactive behaviour, whereby involvement and the emotions of the stakeholders play an important part. If an interactive approach is taken, it is argued that the outcomes will be qualitatively better, since the participants have a greater emotional investment in their new professional activities and actions.
Appendix 1

Objectives of ‘A curriculum for excellence’

Purposes of the curriculum 3-18

**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 well-being • 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 make informed decisions • achieve success in different areas of activity

**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

To enable all young people to become
Literature

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Websites

www.acurriculumforexcellence.co.uk

www.determinedtosucceed.co.uk

www.ltscotland.org.uk

www.glowscotland.org.uk
Case studies basic education in Europe

A comparative study into the motives, functions, resources, design and implementation of common aims and contents of basic education in Europe.