

## **Literacy across the Curriculum**

'Competence and confidence in literacy, including competence in grammar, spelling and the spoken word, are essential for progress in all areas of the curriculum. Because of this, all teachers have responsibility for promoting language and literacy development. Every teacher in each area of the curriculum needs to find opportunities to encourage young people to explain their thinking, debate their ideas and read and write at a level which will help them to develop their language skills further.'

*Building the Curriculum 1*

This paper is for practitioners in all sectors of education and should be read alongside the cover paper for the draft experiences and outcomes in literacy and English. The literacy experiences and outcomes apply to all aspects of learning and across all curriculum areas. All practitioners have a responsibility to develop, reinforce and extend the skills identified.

Literacy is:

the set of skills which allows an individual to engage fully in society and in learning, through the different forms of language, and the range of texts, which society values and finds useful.

The development of literacy skills across the curriculum is not a new feature in Scottish education. The draft literacy outcomes and experiences take account of the work already taking place in schools and other places of learning. They also suggest ways of extending literacy skills further and more overtly. They will help in developing critical and creative thinking as well as competence in listening and talking, reading, writing and important personal, inter-personal and team-working skills. The draft experiences and outcomes for every curriculum area provide opportunities to develop and reinforce literacy skills.

### **Relevance of literacy to all learners**

Our ability to use language lies at the centre of the development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning and our sense of personal identity. Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate is central to an individual's development and wellbeing in our society. It increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life and lays the foundations for lifelong learning and work. Those who are not literate face significant challenges and potentially poor outcomes in terms of their health, wellbeing and employment. Regular emphasis on literacy will make a strong contribution in developing each of the four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* and have a positive effect on attainment in all curriculum areas. It will help learners to develop their skills further, deepen their understanding and, most importantly, learn how these skills apply in new or different contexts.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

Developing literacy skills in learners provides practitioners with opportunities to make effective use of this powerful tool for learning within and across curriculum areas and subjects. Actively developing literacy skills will not only support learning and teaching, but also enhance understanding within curriculum areas.

Language plays a central role in almost all aspects of learning and is very closely linked with how and what we think. Sometimes we need to express our thoughts, feelings and ideas verbally in order to test and develop our understanding of them.

The development of literacy is an integral part of communication during the learning and teaching process. Teachers of all subjects give instructions and explain subject-specific terms. They often rephrase or give additional explanations to address misconceptions and confirm understanding. They stimulate thinking by using challenging questions. They encourage learners to respond at length to their questions, to engage in discussions with their classmates, to listen carefully and to ask questions to deepen their understanding and extend their knowledge.

Teachers recognise the value of well-chosen texts as a way of stimulating learning, for example in providing information, presenting a powerful personal experience or a convincing argument, and in encouraging learners to work independently and co-operatively on identified tasks. Fluent readers are well aware of the power of reading in opening up a new and wider world of knowledge, understanding, experience and opinions.

Equally, extended writing in all curriculum areas gives important opportunities for learners to share and make significant progress in their understanding by thinking and reflecting on their writing. When writing about an event in history, or an appreciation of a work of art, the learner's response becomes the basis of dialogue between teacher and learner and a step change in the learner's progress may take place. Access to learning broadens as reading and writing skills develop and improve.

### **Literacy skills learners need to develop**

The draft literacy experiences and outcomes emphasise the skills which children and young people need. The overarching experiences for literacy and all language learning listed below are closely linked to the four capacities. They can be used in each curriculum area and will help practitioners to plan a wide range of learning activities. This will help to ensure that the development of literacy is part of everyday classroom practice. These overarching experiences are already an important feature of effective practice.

In developing my literacy skills:

- I communicate, collaborate and build relationships
- I learn to reflect on and explain my thinking
- I reflect on how well I am listening and talking, reading and writing. I respond to and act on feedback to help me improve and I provide sensitive and useful feedback to others
- I develop my understanding of how language works and what is special, vibrant and valuable about other languages and cultures and my own
- I engage with a rich range of texts in different media
- I explore the richness and diversity of language, how it can affect me and the wide range of ways in which I and others can be creative
- I appreciate the power of language to influence and bring about change
- I develop an understanding of relationships, motivations, ideas and actions
- I extend and enrich my vocabulary through listening, talking, watching and reading
- I take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT.

At all levels the overarching experiences can be used by practitioners to enable learners to develop their skills at increasing depth within a range of contexts. This in turn will support progression in learning.

The three lines of development for literacy skills are reading, writing, and listening and talking. Within each of these there are organisers relevant to all curriculum areas as indicated in the grid below.

<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Listening and talking</b>
Enjoyment and choice	Enjoyment and choice	Enjoyment and choice
Tools for reading	Tools for writing	Tools for listening and talking
Finding and using information	Organising and using information	Finding and using information
Understanding, analysing and evaluating		Understanding, analysing and evaluating
	Creating texts	Creating texts

A text is the medium through which ideas, experiences, opinions and information can be communicated. Texts include those presented in traditional written or print form, as well as those presented orally, electronically or on film. Texts can be in continuous form, including traditional formal prose, or non-continuous text, such as a chart, graph or webpage. It will be important to provide opportunities for using various and appropriate kinds of texts.

Consideration will need to be given to texts for children and young people with additional support needs. They may, for example, have difficulty understanding what is written or physically handling books and appropriate formats will need to be chosen to meet their needs. See [Books for All](#).

As they progress in their learning, children and young people will encounter texts of increasing complexity in terms of length, structure, vocabulary, ideas and concepts across the curriculum.

The following are some of the literacy needs which the lines of development within literacy can prepare young people for:

<p><b>Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to understand instructions interpret thoughts, ideas and opinions</li> <li>to acquire information in a range of situations</li> <li>to participate in discussion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Talking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to convey information, thoughts, ideas, feelings and opinions</li> <li>to question, hypothesise speculate, evaluate and think critically</li> </ul>
<p><b>Writing using a range of media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to take notes</li> <li>to express a view</li> <li>to write reports</li> <li>to communicate in different contexts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to learn</li> <li>to develop understanding</li> <li>to select and evaluate information</li> <li>for enjoyment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Technology and literacy</b> – taking advantage of the opportunities offered by technologies, for example by using text messages, the internet and email.</p>	

## **Roles and responsibilities**

All those supporting children and young people, including parents, carers, nursery staff and youth workers, have a role in developing literacy. The learning of literacy across the curriculum is a partnership involving all staff working with children and young people, although their respective roles within that partnership will vary. There are rich opportunities for literacy development across all areas of the curriculum and the important links between literacy and learning mean that all practitioners have an important part to play in promoting literacy.

For early years and primary staff this means ensuring that the quality and level of language tasks across the curriculum make full use of the pupils' skills in literacy. In this way skills are reinforced and extended.

For secondary teachers and staff this means taking account of the literacy outcomes in the teaching and learning process within their subject. The draft experiences and outcomes in each curriculum area will suggest opportunities where learning within the subject can go hand in hand with the development of literacy skills. This variety of contexts makes learning relevant, motivating and promotes progress.

For staff working in colleges, youth work settings and work places this means continuing to develop the young person's literacy skills in meaningful contexts.

## **Taking stock and planning for improvement**

As each establishment reviews its policy and practice relating to literacy development, it is important that it takes account of and actively promotes opportunities for developing literacy across the curriculum. A successful approach to literacy across the curriculum depends upon effective and sustained leadership and commitment within and across sectors, with staff that have a clear understanding of their respective roles and contributions, working collaboratively. Whilst every teacher has a leadership role, the management of literacy across the curriculum requires careful and strategic planning.

Establishments should take into consideration the diversity of language within their communities in Scotland, valuing the languages children and young people bring with them. There should be shared, consistent expectations of standards of literacy and very strong connections between literacy learning in English and other languages and literacy development in other areas of the curriculum.

In reviewing policies on literacy, establishments will need to consider areas such as:

- collaborative learning and working
- inter-disciplinary learning
- cross-sector working (in particular for methodology and moderation)
- working with other providers
- critical thinking skills
- generating ideas and preparing for writing
- using discussion as a learning strategy
- self and peer assessment
- effective use of technologies
- ensuring consistent approaches to, for example, the use of open-ended questions and codes for spelling and grammar.

Each establishment will wish to consider and develop its approach to literacy across the curriculum in accordance with its own and local authority improvement planning processes. The following questions may support the process of evaluation and planning for development and improvement. These questions provide a starting point or focus for discussion and review, and supplement the questions for reflection in the accompanying literacy and English cover paper.

## Points for consideration

- How well are all our children and young people progressing in the development of their literacy skills? How coherent is their experience of literacy across the curriculum? How do we know?

Aspects for discussion might include:

- collaboration in planning for the inclusion of literacy skills
  - support for ongoing dialogue between learners and teachers.
- Do our current systems for the transfer of information between sectors, and between faculties or departments, support progression and ensure that prior learning is reinforced and unnecessary repetition avoided?
  - How do we ensure that children and young people with literacy difficulties are given appropriate support across the curriculum?
  - How do we identify and address the development needs of staff to ensure that they have the appropriate skills to teach and reinforce literacy skills?
  - In the life and work of the establishment, where do real and meaningful opportunities for the development of literacy skills already exist?

How could we build on these across the four contexts of the curriculum as outlined in *Progress and Proposals*<sup>ii</sup>.

- the ethos and life of the school as a community
  - curriculum areas and subjects
  - interdisciplinary projects and studies
  - opportunities for personal achievement
- Does our current policy and practice support the *Curriculum for Excellence* approach to literacy set out in the draft experiences and outcomes?
    - How could we further develop and extend this?
    - How can we use the draft experiences and outcomes to promote good practice in literacy across the curriculum?
  - How can we build on our current structures to lead and develop literacy across the whole school?
  - In secondary schools and colleges, what will we expect of each faculty or subject department and each teacher or lecturer in developing literacy skills?
  - In secondary schools and colleges, what role will our language specialists have in supporting literacy across the curriculum?
  - What role will teachers play in monitoring, evaluating and communicating the progress of children and young people in literacy?
  - How do we provide opportunities at all stages for learners to review and refresh earlier learning in literacy?
  - What strategies can we use to engage and involve parents and the wider community in supporting our work on literacy?
  - How will we evaluate the impact of the teaching of literacy across the curriculum?

## Useful references

*Curriculum for Excellence*

<http://www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/index.asp>

Learning and Teaching Scotland – Literacy

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/literacy/index.asp>

Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2001/07/9471/File-1>

Books for All

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/06/05081600/0>

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## List of above-mentioned links

<sup>i</sup> Books for All <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/06/05081600/0>

<sup>ii</sup> Progress and Proposals <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/98764/0023924.pdf>