

STIRLING STRATEGIC PLANNING ALLIANCE

ADDRESSING CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

1 Background

Since the establishment of the Strategic Learning Alliance for Stirling there has been considerable discussion around roles and relationships in the framework of Curriculum for Excellence. I had agreed that I would write a paper on this to bring back to the Strategic learning alliance unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to do before completing my tenure as Director of Children's Services within Stirling. However, I hope the paper will be helpful in informing the future work of the group

2 The Role of the Strategic Learning Alliance

The role of the group has been clearly set out in a number of papers and in minutes of the meetings held up until now. Primarily the role of the group is to ensure that there can be effective progression for learners within Stirling from the earliest stages of Education through further and higher education and that there should be clear pathways established which would encourage learners to stay within the Stirling area and to assist us in meeting the needs of the economy within Stirling particularly in the difficult financial times which may lie ahead of us.

The partners promoting this progression include early years centres; schools; Forth Valley College; Stirling University; Community Education within Stirling Council and also through the voluntary sector and cultural organisations such as the MacRobert Centre who have been consistently involved in group discussions up until now. As well as ensuring progression and the establishment of clear pathways for learners the group also aimed to ensure that transitions were made as easy as possible between agencies within Stirling and between stages within the learners educational journey. In order to do this we require to achieve effective articulation between stages. A key part of establishing articulation comes through the framework of Curriculum for Excellence. In addition, to the establishment of progression the Strategic Learning Alliance also wanted to ensure that the breadth of educational opportunity within Stirling was maintained and were possible enhanced and that we took full advantage of that in developing pathways for learning. Finally, Strategic Alliance aim to take appropriate steps to ensure maximum involvement of learners and the opportunities available within the Stirling area and in order to do so they wanted to promote engagement with learners.

The Learning Alliance has always been aware of the existence of the learning in the community critical partnership and has been keen to ensure that we work together effectively with that group. The Learning & Community Critical Partnership has a clear work plan which it is addressing. It maybe that given changes in the Community Planning structure within Stirling the role and work plan of this group maybe amended to some extent and the Strategic Learning Alliance will ensure that it is fully informed of these changes and continues to work effectively around this group.

3 Curriculum for Excellence

This is a very new and different type of curriculum development from anything that we have previously encountered. Unlike most previous developments it has not been focused on changes in content, rather it has been focused on changes in approach, both in assessment, methodology and content. Much of what is being sought through Curriculum for Excellence is the development of current good practice within the education system and arguably it is an effort to ensure that all young people are given the best possible chance of encountering that good practice wherever they are

educated within the school structure. Similarly that opportunity should be available to learners in other contexts.

Curriculum for Excellence is based around four capacities for successful learning, for responsible citizenship, for effective participation and for the establishment of confident individuals particularly in the context of learning. It is supported by a set of experiences and outcomes, which give more detail of what we would expect learners to be able to accomplish and what experiences we would expect them to have. That said it is not the intention that the experiences and outcomes should be used as a set of grade related criteria for marking purposes, rather that they should provide a basis for curriculum design. The focus in the early stages for Curriculum for Excellence has been very much in school and early years settings and as a result other groups have felt to some extent excluded from the development. More recently there has been a significant push to ensure that all sectors are involved in the development of Curriculum for Excellence. However, again it is important to note the extent of change that will be required in each of the different contexts. Arguably higher education calls for more independent learning in any case. It also requires the learner to take considerable responsibility for their own learning and to be actively engaged in the learning environment. This can also be true of further education were learners often remark on the difference in ethos between schools and further education.

In a sense Curriculum for Excellence is designed to ensure that young people are more effectively prepared for moving forward on their learning journey and to ensure that they have the capacity for learning which will assist them in being successful in these contexts. It is also worth noting that as learners move forward with their learning there is an increased demand for specialisation in any case. Much of the work that will be undertaken in further and higher education will be very specific and vocationally focused. Medicine for example, or engineering or vocational activities such as trades require a body of knowledge and there should be no change in that requirement or demand. In that sense there is less demand for change in practice in these particular contexts. In schools however, there has been a recognition that particularly in the secondary context we have been focused in ensuring young peoples success in gaining qualifications and sometimes this has narrowed their experience and as a result some have found it difficult to cope with learning in other environments without the sort of support which was on offer in the school context. Arguably, in practical terms there will be more requirements for change then, in approaches to mainstream school activity than in other areas.

It is likely that there will be a change in the qualifications that are available to learners as a result of Curriculum for Excellence and some of these changes are already in train. There is a simplification of the assessment system, however, young people under their learners will still pursue higher courses. However, it may be that the demands of assessment within these courses will change and it is important that higher education and further education as receivers of these qualifications are fully aware of there implications and place value on the qualifications and the means of assessment leading to that qualification. It is also important that in terms of preparedness, Community Education, Higher & Further Education are clear about the demands which they would wish to make of pupils. This would also apply to employers and it may well be that the Strategic Learning Alliance would wish to consider whether or not the involvement of the employers representatives would strengthen the group.

The Strategic Learning Alliance can provide a useful forum for sharing information on developments and ensuring that there is a good understanding and a ready acceptance of changes within the Stirling area. There are particular issues in terms of initial teacher education and it is important that we forge good links between schools and Stirling University to ensure that students are prepared for the kinds of experiences that they are likely to be offered within Stirling schools.

It seems clear that the lead in Curriculum for Excellence should be taken by the Head of Education from Stirling Council or their representative. It should be recognised that this representative cannot simply provide all training that may be required and it would be important that the Strategic Learning Alliance works together closely to ensure that the burden of such training is shared.

I hope that these suggestions prove useful in taking forward Curriculum for Excellence and encouraging the establishment of a healthy Strategic Alliance within Stirling.