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Implications of Curriculum Reform for School Buildings in Scotland

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Implications of Curriculum Reform for School Buildings in Scotland

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Scotland's Building Excellence programme is exploring the implications of curriculum reform for school building design. It includes events which bring together teachers, designers, school managers and local authorities.

OVERVIEW

In 2007, the Scottish government ran *Building Excellence*, a programme of events exploring the implications of the on-going review of the 3-18 curriculum (the *Curriculum for Excellence*) for the design of new or refurbished schools and for the design and use of space in existing schools. The programme brought together those responsible for devising and delivering the education which young people receive with those responsible for planning, designing and building the schools in which the education is delivered.

The *Building Excellence* programme included events run directly by the Scottish government as well as an integral project, *Senses of Place: Building Excellence*, commissioned by the Scottish government and run by The Lighthouse (Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City). Key messages were presented in a publication disseminated at a national school estate conference.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

Curriculum for Excellence is a programme based on a publication by the same name which sets out values, purposes and principles for a 3 to 18 curriculum. Published in November 2004 following a national debate on education in Scotland, the document provides explicit statements of Scotland's educational aims. At its heart lies the aspiration that all children and young people should develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Curriculum for Excellence recognises that the "curriculum" extends beyond the traditional study areas and subjects; it is the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people throughout their education. At all stages from the early years to the end of secondary schooling, the curriculum should therefore include, in addition to the traditional areas and subjects, "learning through the ethos and life of the school as a community; through interdisciplinary projects and studies; and through opportunities for personal achievement". Thus *Curriculum for Excellence* recognises the importance of learning that takes place outside the classroom, such as the educational benefits of effective interaction between the school and its wider community.

The programme is being developed via a four-way partnership of the Scottish government, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, in co-operation with local authorities responsible for delivery through schools and other educational establishments. The plans will be firmed up in the 2008/09 school year, and from 2009/10 all schools across Scotland will be working on the delivery of the new curriculum.

In summary, *Curriculum for Excellence* is about achieving transformation within the Scottish education system, putting in place changes in learning, teaching and leadership that will improve:

- skills for learning, vocational skills and skills for life;
- attainment and broader achievement;
- attendance and staying-on rates.

The aim is to raise educational outcomes for all young people and in particular to provide more choices and chances for those who are disaffected and attain below their potential. A key objective is to provide enhanced value from education both to individuals and the wider Scottish economy. The programme does not relate entirely or exclusively to the Scottish curriculum but instead, in its aspirations and execution, touches upon and influences every aspect of the Scottish education system.

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BUILDING EXCELLENCE

The *Building Excellence* programme was launched in early 2007, aiming to explore how new approaches to learning and teaching which are being encouraged through the curriculum review process might impact on the design and use of space, and vice versa. The programme set out to challenge those who plan, design and use schools to think afresh about the relationship between the physical environment and successful learning and teaching. This will be as important for existing schools as it is for the design of new or refurbished schools.

A seminar in March 2007 brought together teachers, architects, designers, school estate managers and other educationalists to consider ways in which *Curriculum for Excellence* might impact on school design.

This was followed by a workshop in May 2007. Kenn Fisher (Rubida Research) spoke about the relationship between pedagogy and space, using theory, practice and case studies to explore how *Curriculum for Excellence* will require new thinking regarding the design of learning environments. John Worthington (DEGW) focused on the school's role in the community, considering how urban design and planning influences, and is influenced by, learning communities. Workshop sessions, led by Susan Stuebing (LearnRing) and Fiona Duggan (FiD Ltd) helped delegates consider these themes in the context of Scottish schools.

Senses of Place: Building Excellence

As an integral part of the *Building Excellence* programme, the Scottish government commissioned The Lighthouse to work directly with local authorities, schools and designers. The *Senses of Place: Building Excellence* project aimed to develop aspirations for the design of school buildings and their grounds in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Using exemplars of design adaptations, it is now demonstrating the ways in which well designed learning environments can support the effective delivery of the new curriculum.



St. Andrew's High School, North Lanarkshire

The project is now in the final phase of three:

Phase 1 (April-June 2007) – *Sensing Your Place: A Collaboration with Local Authorities and Schools.* During this phase The Lighthouse worked with five local authorities. Each local authority provided 20 professionals and a team of young people. The professionals had experience in innovative aspirational learning and services in their roles as school managers, local authority officers, teachers, community professionals, community members/parents and representatives of national organisations. The team of young people were of similar ages, but had varying degrees of success within the current education system.

These teams worked with facilitators to look at how space, place and learning come together to make an education service. They then explored their aspirations for the *Curriculum for Excellence*, using these to create ideas for future design interventions, refurbishments and rebuilds.

Phase 2 (July-November 2007) – *Design Challenge: A Collaboration with Architects and Designers.* For this stage, The Lighthouse organised a design challenge, bringing together leading architects and designers from local authorities and the private sector. They worked collaboratively to study the design briefs submitted. These creative teams comprised a range of professionals specialising in different areas of design, including those with experience in designing learning environments and designing for organisational change.

Phase 3 (February-April 2008) – *Legacy: Exhibition, Film and Publication.* An exhibition of the design exemplars will take place in The Lighthouse, Glasgow, from 19 February to mid April 2008. Additionally, The Lighthouse has produced a participative publication and film, to be launched at the beginning of the exhibition. These aim to illustrate how this creative process can develop design exemplars for a specific place.

BUILDING EXCELLENCE PUBLICATION AND CONFERENCE

The Scottish government has produced a publication to capture the main messages which have emerged from the *Building Excellence* programme so far. In essence, it is a resource for school managers, planners, designers, head teachers and teachers to help stimulate thinking about the implications of the *Curriculum for Excellence* for the design and use of space and for the school's role in supporting the community. It demonstrates ways in which these issues can be explored with groups of stakeholders in workshops, and highlights examples of innovative practice from across Scotland. The aim was to provide a framework within which the major issues could be discussed, rather than identifying detailed solutions.

The publication was launched at the *Building Excellence* conference held on 5 December 2007 in the Glasgow Science Centre. The conference highlighted innovative practice from around the country, and included presentations from the following people: Ian Smith (Learning Unlimited), who explored the role of design in helping to create the "self-motivating classroom"; Les Watson, who shared the concepts and educational vision behind the design of the award-winning Glasgow Caledonian University Saltire Centre; Anne Cunningham (The Lighthouse), who disseminated the outcomes from the *Senses of Place: Building Excellence* project; and Barry Best, who discussed DEGW's approach to innovating with space through Project Faraday, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Family. One of the most powerful presentations of the day came from three West Lothian students involved in the *Senses of Place: Building Excellence* project. They spoke about their particular project which focuses on environments for learning about and through science within a secondary school.

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CONCLUSION

Building Excellence has shown so far that there is scope to help teachers and other school users understand the ways in which the design and configuration of space impact on learning and teaching. This is as relevant in considering how existing learning environments might be easily reconfigured by the users as it is in considering the design of new or refurbished schools. Therefore, it is important to find ways and spend time to help school users articulate their needs more effectively in the context of a new design or consider how to use existing spaces more creatively.

Similarly, architects, designers and school managers need to better understand both the requirements of new approaches to learning and teaching and the way that the design and configuration of space can aid this, in the context of preparing briefs, accommodation schedules and designs for new or refurbished schools. Workshops that bring together school users, designers and managers can clearly help to generate this understanding.

Building Excellence has also highlighted not only the role of good design in fostering a constructive relationship between the school and its wider community, but also the contribution that such a relationship can make to achieving the aims of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The *Curriculum for Excellence* programme is about breaking down the barriers that often exist between individual subject areas and demonstrating the wider educational value of activities and experiences that take place throughout the school outside the classroom. Classrooms; sports, cultural and dining facilities; school grounds; circulation, assembly and social spaces; internal environmental conditions; sustainability and the relationship with the wider community can all be considered in the context of their potential educational contribution to the individual young person. This can allow teachers

and school managers to better understand and utilise the potential role of good design and space management in achieving genuine educational transformation. Likewise, it can provide an opportunity for designers and architects to gain a holistic understanding of a school's requirements.

Curriculum for Excellence offers a framework within which excellent learning and teaching can take place. It does not prescribe a single approach to the delivery of the curriculum, but rather encourages a range of learning and teaching styles. For this reason, no single design solutions will accommodate the new curriculum – such solutions will vary according to local needs and can only be developed by educators and designers working collaboratively, a process that has already begun. The *Building Excellence* programme has sought to stimulate debate on this topic, and will be followed by further work in 2008 to advance thinking around school environments in Scotland.

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