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CfE Briefing

Personalised Learning

These briefings provide information and advice for practitioners, parents and partners in their implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

Scottish education is going through a period of significant change to its curriculum, learning and teaching, the processes that underpin them, and to the qualifications that they may lead to. Education Scotland is supporting this change by evaluating and sharing evolving practice as part of a national professional learning community. This paper is the fifth in a series of briefings which provide succinct advice on the progress being made in key areas of change, to help inform discussion and promote further innovative development. This addition to the series explores the practical implications for staff, learners and parents of personalised learning which presumes a degree of choice and a stronger role for the learner in making decisions. The paper also

explores the entitlement to personal support as the means of ensuring personalisation. A small number of learners with significant barriers to learning need their learning personalised to the point where it is individualised, so the paper explores practical examples.

“A school is excellent to the extent that learners have choice in their learning. Teachers fully demonstrate the links with previous learning across the curriculum and real-life situations and make new learning meaningful. Learners themselves want to reach the highest possible standards.”.

The Journey to Excellence

November 2012

Personalised learning means tailoring learning and teaching to learners' needs.



1. Why is personalised learning important in CfE?

Personalised learning means **tailoring learning and teaching** to learners' needs. Staff do this by **knowing learners well and building on prior learning** so that all learners can participate, progress and achieve. Personalised learning focuses on the individual learner from the earliest level through to lifelong learning. It is key to taking forward the ambitions of CfE and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)¹. It represents best practice in learning and teaching and includes:

- recognition that all learning matters;
- building on prior learning;
- learning that actively involves learners;
- engaging and enterprising learning;
- ensuring a variety of contexts for learning;
- involving learners in planning and being responsive to their needs and interests; and
- experiences where learners benefit from assessment that is integral to and informs learning.

Personalisation means ensuring appropriate progression pathways for different groups of learners through their Broad General Education and into the senior phase. Learners are involved in planning next steps in learning and also in deciding which qualifications to study and at which level, taking into account opportunities for and entry requirements of further and higher education and employment, as well as strengths and interests.

Assessment that is personalised ensures that every learner is involved in decisions about the type of assessment that allows them to show what they have learned most effectively. Just as personalisation means a broad range of approaches to learning and teaching, it also means a variety of approaches to assessment. Assessment approaches within qualifications are being broadened to reflect personalisation more directly.

A key aspect of personalisation is about taking account of the needs of **learners who need additional support**. The next sections address some of the key questions about personalisation as they apply to all learners but with a particular focus on those who need additional support.

2. How does personalised learning take account of additional support needs?

Learners progress at different rates and need different levels of support. Where targeted support is required to meet additional needs, early identification of barriers is key. Support to remove barriers that may restrict access to learning will

ensure that every learner has every opportunity to achieve the best they can. This may involve providing a curriculum in ways which build on individual skills and abilities. It may also include opportunities for learning through different contexts which involve breadth, challenge and application of learning. This can also be an effective way of meeting the learning needs of very able learners. Many staff personalise learning through appropriate plans including **individualised educational programmes**. They ensure that staged intervention frameworks, assessment and support are co-ordinated by staff with additional expertise. In some instances it will be done in partnership with specialist staff and partners outwith the establishment.

Planning a suitable programme of learning for all children and young people means planning for additional challenge for some, and support for others. Regardless of individual abilities, all learners are entitled to experience the Broad General Education, appropriately pitched. Learning will be rooted in the experiences and outcomes at an appropriate level. For learners who may not progress significantly beyond early and first level outcomes, it is still possible to plan progression through the experiences beyond these levels. For example, a learner with complex additional support needs may experience celebrations, festivals and customs in religious people's lives (RME 0.06a). Building on a growing awareness at the early level, the learner may experience how followers of world religions demonstrate their beliefs

¹ GIRFEC <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright>

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(RME 1-06a). The learner may then experience different forms of worship and artefacts within world religions (RME 2-06a). Much of the learning will be experiential and the learner may not demonstrate the full range of outcomes. However, their learning is planned as a progressive experience building on prior learning or experiences.

Equally, a learner may make limited progress through literacy and numeracy outcomes but excel in a specific area of expressive arts. Personalised learning takes full account of each learner's skills, interests and abilities, as well as any need for additional support. Hence, for a small group of learners, the emphasis may be more on the experience than the outcome, but their learning is still structured around the experiences and outcomes.

3. How does personalised learning ensure learners are active partners in learning?

CfE gives a new emphasis on every learner being an active participant and contributor to their own

learning. Involving learners in planning, assessment and building on their interests and prior learning, all assume helping them to gain the skills to take a lead role in their own learning. Personalised learning helps every individual to develop and understand their own distinctive set of skills and abilities, into adulthood and beyond. Widespread use of collaborative approaches to learning and teaching, including cooperative learning and critical skills, help to develop the skills learners need to lead their own learning and to support each other to learn. Emerging technologies also allow them to develop their own learning in a range of creative ways through a wide range of personal and shared approaches. Ensuring learners are active partners can be challenging. Recent research published by the OECD² shows that:

Highly personalised curricula have been found to increase students' time on task and overall engagement with learning (p.233).

A literature review³ of personalised

learning concludes that, at the simplest level, establishing prior knowledge and building on it is an effective form of personalisation. Personalisation should not be confused with individualisation, though.

Strategies that personalise through, for example, ensuring that prior experience of pupils is drawn on in lessons, increases pupil participation, without assuming individualisation, and therefore may be more realistic. (Sebba et al, p.66)

A further opportunity for personalisation is given by the flexibility of the CfE Framework, based on entitlements. Teachers and learners now have the space to put together meaningful programmes to suit needs using the experiences and outcomes. Assessment is integral to this learning rather than learning being driven by assessment. The flexibility within CfE, therefore, ensures that there need be no conflict between personalisation and ensuring entitlements are met.

4. The entitlement to support: How are all children and young people supported to personalise their learning?

For learners to experience personalisation within their learning, it is essential that they are known well and that their learning is recognised and valued, including where feasible their learning beyond the classroom. Wherever learning is taking place, the day-to-day interactions between staff and learners are vital for personalised learning. It is likely that a key adult



² Dumont, H., Istance, D. & Benavides, F.(eds)(2010) *The Nature of Learning. Using Research to Inspire Practice*, OECD.

³ Sebba, J., Brown, N., Steward, S., Galton, M. & James, M. (2007) *An investigation of personalised learning: Approaches used by schools.*

Personalised learning helps every individual to develop and understand their own distinctive set of skills and abilities, into adulthood and beyond.

has a holistic overview of a learner's progress and personal development. Central to the entitlement to support is the opportunity for every learner to have regular and frequent discussions with an adult. This may be their teacher or perhaps a member of the guidance team, who may also link closely with partner agencies. This adult will know the learner well and be able to guide a review of learning to help identify and plan next steps. Indeed, this very same person may also be involved in working with the learner in the profiling process. Some secondary schools are moving towards developing all teachers as key adults. They do this, for example, by enhancing the role of form tutors or mentors with dedicated time and access to information about the learner from across the curriculum, including out-of-class learning and achievements. This support is a universal entitlement for all learners, as described in BtC3.

5. How can we take forward our approaches to personalised learning?

Personalised learning is key to improving learning and teaching for all learners, and is best when it is underpinned by **effective self-evaluation** which involves everyone who has a stake. It involves strong teamwork and objective **professional dialogue** amongst staff and partner professionals, and the full involvement of learners and their parents. It also means learning from elsewhere where others are

also developing personalised learning, with a clear focus on the **needs of learners**. This means ensuring rigour in approaches to monitoring and tracking progress, and using the information to guide learning and choices.

Consideration of this paper and the following questions will help us all to develop our approaches further.

- To what extent do we have a shared understanding of what personalised learning involves?
- Does our understanding include knowing the strengths and needs of individual learners and building on their prior learning; providing structured feedback; using a range of learning and teaching strategies; choice within learning and within the curriculum; and taking account of individual learners' views?
- What practical steps have we taken to ensure learners have the skills they need to take a lead role in their own learning?
- How well do staff know learners as individuals?
- What information is available to staff to ensure they have as full a picture as they need of learners' achievements and needs?
- How well does our curriculum planning meet the needs of different groups of learners?
- How do we ensure that learners who need additional support have personalised and meaningful progression pathways?

- How effective are our arrangements to ensure that all learners have regular and frequent discussions with an adult who knows them well in order to review learning and plan next steps?
- Does a key adult or mentor have a holistic overview of each learners' progress?
- For those young people who need targeted support, do we have robust arrangements to ensure they make appropriate progress?
- How effectively do we involve parents and partner agencies to ensure learners benefit from the right support at the right time?
- How do parents understand what personalised learning means for their child and how they can support/contribute to their child's learning?
- How well do you use and build on learning that takes place outwith the classroom?
- How do you know if personalisation is actually happening and what impact it is having?

