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College Development Network

UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CURRICULUM OFFER AND LEARNER PROFILE



This self-directed module leads you to explore your college's curriculum offer and learner profile in greater depth.

A selection of activities are provided so that you can pick those most relevant to your learning journey.

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1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A participant will be able to:

- Identify how knowledge of the national and local needs can be used to create a curriculum offer that will enable learners to progress to their desired destinations;
- describe the current curriculum mix and offer of their organisation and its relevance; and
- be aware of key factors and questions related to appropriately funding the curriculum

2. HOW TO USE THIS PACK

You should first complete the online module C6a: Introduction to curriculum design and planning. It provides the background to exploring this module.

Before you start reading this pack, sit down with your board secretary/governance professional and look through the exercises and what you might need for them. Exercises are indicated by this icon:



There are a number of exercises; it is up to you how many you work through. Look at the different topics covered and decide which you will complete. You should then read through all the materials, in readiness for your chosen exercises. This module includes a number of discussion points – talk to your board secretary about who it would be best to discuss these with – for instance, other board members who are completing the module, a senior manager in the college, the board secretary.

This module does not have an assessment. Instead, you should keep a list alongside the exercises you complete which details any further information you need to gather about your college or the FE sector, actions you will take over the next year as a result of your learning from this module, and reminders that will help your own practice. You should then use these notes to form an action plan.

3. INTRODUCTION

As you learnt in C6a, as a board member you are required to take a strategic overview of your college's curriculum offer, ensuring that it's in line with the college's mission and strategic plan. This involves scrutinising the planning of the curriculum and its relationship to learner development and progression. You also need to understand the impact of local and national policy on the college's curriculum development.

The current policy drivers for funding post-16 education and training include employability, apprenticeships, and world class skills. Policy drivers change over time, so it is important to stay up to date where possible with the latest news and updates on these. Your principal and board secretary can help you to stay informed, but it is also important to seek this information out for yourself.

Plan, offer and implementation

In the process of designing the curriculum, the college's leadership will need to consider several factors about implementation and quality. Board members will be important in ensuring that the decisions made on the curriculum are in line with the college's mission and strategy and careful planning has been undertaken to produce strong outcomes for learners.

The quality framework *How good is our college?* provides a structure for evaluation and enhancement which colleges with their stakeholders can use to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. It is designed to support collaborative evaluation internally and with external stakeholders who contribute to the learning experience.

See [How good is our college?](#)

- **Delivery of learning and services to support learning** is an indicator relates to the curriculum delivered by colleges. It explores how the curriculum takes account of strategic drivers to meet the needs of all learners and stakeholders including employers. It examines how curriculum teams work together, promote equity and develop positive learning attitudes. It reflects how well skills for learning, life and work are planned and delivered across learning programmes. It examines the provision of progression routes within and beyond college from all programmes



Board members can ask a range of questions of their own colleges and gain more insight into the effectiveness of the design and plans for their college curriculum:

- What is known about the cohort(s) of learners who will be accessing the curriculum?
- How will learners be given opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge they acquire through taught aspects of the curriculum?
- Are there multiple opportunities that will be accessible and/or engaging for different categories of learners?
- Have arrangements been made to accommodate all learners within the curriculum (including those with SEN, disabilities, or other additional needs)?
- Where relevant, have external stakeholders (e.g. employers) been involved in supporting the delivery of the curriculum?

- What resourcing has gone into the delivery of the curriculum and how does this compare with the previous offer?
- What is the process of review to ensure the college can adapt to the latest changes in policy or to the labour market?
- What are the processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the curriculum?



EXERCISE 1

Consider some of the reports the principal has presented to board members in the past.

- What curriculum matters are raised?
- What national or local influences do you note in board meetings?

Considering what you know about current policy priorities, what questions would you ask based on these reports? Consider the policy drivers.

4. WHO ARE THE COLLEGE'S LEARNERS AND WHAT COURSES WILL THEY BE OFFERED?

In module C6a, you learnt about the different types of providers in the sector, and also heard about some learners studying in the sector. At your college induction or other training events, you will have learnt more about the learners studying at your college, and the levels and types of courses they follow.

The curriculum development team (including course leaders and managers), would have developed the curriculum with the learner population in mind. The content, sequencing and assessment of learners would also have been developed based on an understanding of the different types of learners that will access the programme. However, what is offered to learners on entry and the structure of the offer is a very intricate process involving constant interaction between the team overseeing the curriculum delivery (implementation) and those in charge of recruitment and admission of learners. It is important that board members are aware of the process and can ensure that it is working optimally so that the final offer to learners meets the mission of the college and the principles that were established at the design stage.

As soon as applications open, the process of attempting to know the incoming cohort of learners begins alongside that of understanding their course preferences and capabilities. At an early stage, colleges open what is sometimes called a 'course file'. This tracks a number of key factors which enable the leaders to determine whether indicated preferences will mean that courses on offer are viable and/or how many groups will be

needed for particular courses. For example, if only two applicants have indicated an interest in a photography course, there will not be sufficient numbers to make the course viable.

Decisions like these require a number of inputs from the finance, curriculum and admissions departments of the college and good practice usually entails:

- early monitoring of applications.
- making assumptions based on the previous achievement rates, conversion rate of learners, course selection patterns (trends over recent years), etc. While assumptions are unavoidable colleges try to glean as much data as possible from multiple sources and appoint members to their admissions team with strong experience in this area. It is essential that college leaders allow and plan for variances from the assumptions made.
- establish a risk (and opportunities) register from January which captures and develops responses for the factors that affect the enrolment of learners and the ability of the college to deliver its curriculum as planned. These include:
 - recruitment of too few learners
 - closing or opening of a similar course in another college
 - changes in the national policy context which affect curriculum decisions
 - the skillset of staff to meet the needs of pupils (e.g. retraining some staff and/or reliance on use of agency staff)

- ensuring that those supporting the interview process for learners, are Information, Advice and Guidance (AIG) qualified to be better able to feedback into building a more accurate picture of the learner intake
- planning for limited and/or inaccurate learner data from previous school or other organisation. It can be expensive for a college if there is not enough information to develop plans to support learners effectively and so it is important to glean as much as possible from the data provided. However, colleges should expect that some learners will have more needs than reported. This is particularly the case with learners with special educational needs or those with other needs (such as English as a second language).

Perhaps the most important thing for board members to take note of in this process is the fact that colleges are unable to know precisely how many learners they will have or who their learners will be until registration.. Therefore, while a lot of work will be done by the admissions team to get learners through the door and to profile them, the approach many colleges take is to organise candidates into different 'certainty categories' and to then use collated information and previous experience to estimate and plan accordingly.

The focus for board members should therefore be on the robustness of the contingency planning that has taken or is taking place and the risk management process to ensure that the various potentially damaging (or potentially beneficial) scenarios have been identified and planned for.



EXERCISE 2

- 1 Ask your board secretary for summary information on attendance, retention, achievement, success rate, progress and destination data on the learner cohort from the current and the previous two academic years.

Look at the trends over the last couple of years in terms of learner numbers, balance of full- and part-time, and the levels and types of courses on offer by comparing the most recent data with that for the previous two years. What patterns, if any, emerge?.

- 2 Ask for information on the college's curriculum plan.
 - How does it reflect the trends identified in Exercise 2.1?
 - How does the current curriculum strategy fit with the trends? Are there any implications for the strategic plan? Discuss.

Now that you have a clear overview of the college's learners, you can take a closer look at how this works in practice. Bear in mind when completing this next exercise that you are getting only a snapshot, rather than the full picture.

A key responsibility for board members is ensuring equality of opportunity for all learners. It is important to think about how different learners experience the college, and whether their needs are taken into account.

5. FUNDING AND RESOURCING THE CURRICULUM

Financial support for learners is a complex and ever-changing area, but it is important for you to have a basic understanding of the system of funding and how it is implemented by your own college. Funding priorities are set annually and shift in order to meet national skills needs.

While each college will have its own mix of priorities and strategies, the majority of a college's budget is allocated to staffing..

Therefore, board members will not only need to ensure that the curriculum is staffed effectively, but also that what remains to be spent directly on the curriculum, has been carefully scrutinised in relation to meeting agreed objectives. Relative to their context, board members may want to consider factors such as whether funding:

- meets a national policy priority for the whole cohort (or a part of it)
- provides an evidenced-based opportunity for improvement of outcomes
- untested but potentially high impact opportunity for improvement of outcomes
- will be used to meet a local or national employer need that will attract learners

You can find more information about funding in modules C9, P7 and A5. In this module the relevant questions for board members to seek assurances on are:

- Is the college investing enough in providing the courses that are in demand by the local learner population?
- Is the college marketing its unique selling points, as offered through the curriculum, as effectively as possible?
- Are the courses offered by the college resourced sufficiently to facilitate the best outcomes for learners?
- Is there funding to ensure that course leaders can provide additional support and/or resources, as necessary for all learners (e.g. disadvantaged and high achieving) to secure the best outcomes?
- Are there contingencies in the budget to allow for intake numbers that are less than projections?
- Are there contingencies to allow for senior management to respond to increase in staffing costs that may result from learner choices?
- Are there contingencies for costs associated with learners with unexpected additional needs?



EXERCISE 3

- 1 Consider your learning points against each of the summary points above. Consider the opportunities for scrutiny and challenge of the curriculum offer. What further reflection or preparation do you need to enable you to participate fully in these discussions?
- 2 You should now have enough material to form your personal action plan. You may find it easier to develop a table, see the example below. You could list your planned actions under the subject headings used below. You should plan when you intend to complete each action and note down how each action will help you carry out your role.

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Topic | |
| Planned action | |
| Intended impact | |
| Timescale | |
| Use of learning | |

6. SUMMARY

- The curriculum is the core activity of the college and therefore a major responsibility for board members. One important aspect of this is to match the curriculum with the needs of the community the college serves
- There are a number of national and local influences on the curriculum offer of a college, some of them Government-led and others specific to the community served by the college
- The intent, implementation and impact of the curriculum is a useful framework for understanding how the curriculum can be designed and delivered to meet employer and learner needs
- It is important that board members understand the learner profile at the college so that they understand for reasons for the structure of the curriculum offer. Special consideration must be given to widening participation and providing equality of opportunity, including opportunities for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties and learners whose first language is not English
- The offer to the learners will be based on the work of the curriculum design but also on the work of the admissions team along with those responsible for finance and curriculum. It is important to have a system of monitoring and reporting (such as a risk register) so college leaders (and board members) are regularly updated on learner recruitment and how numbers are impacting on the offer.
- Where the college's curriculum offer seeks to attract adult learners, it must take into account a number of factors specific to this group. For example, prior experiences of education and training, confidence levels, family commitments and responsibilities, and progression options
- Board members not only need to consider how staff will be used to deliver the curriculum effectively but must also reflect on whether funding has contingencies and meets agreed objectives of the college



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