

Planning a revised key stage 3 curriculum

Alan Kinder examines the new Programme of Study for KS3 geography as a framework to support curriculum making. He discusses how you might make use of the key concepts in planning and demonstrates the use of a planning grid.

Why revise your key stage 3 curriculum?

In September 2007, all secondary schools in England received revised key stage 3 Programmes of Study (PoS) from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The PoS for geography is included here as a pull-out supplement, and the PoS and supporting guidance are also available on the internet (www.qca.org.uk/secondarycurriculumreview/). This sets out the statutory framework for geography, for implementation from September 2008. In order to meet the requirements of the revised PoS, it is extremely likely that some changes will need to be made to your current key stage 3 provision.

Implications of the revised Programme of Study for your curriculum

Greater flexibility

The revised PoS are intended to introduce greater flexibility and allow the development of a 'local curriculum' within a national framework. QCA intends that there should be improved coherence across subjects with more interconnected learning, and an opportunity to personalise the curriculum by allowing students to 'dig deeper' on some parts of the curriculum, or 'linger longer' when more time is needed to secure the learning (QCA 2007). This

flexibility should be seen as an opportunity to reinvigorate geography, not as a threat to its rigour. Any suggestion that the new PoS is somehow content-free, or that it implies less curriculum time, should be challenged robustly, if we are to avoid the 'curriculum vandalism' feared by some informed commentators (Roberts, 2006).

Newly-defined aims

The revised curriculum aims to develop, through all subjects:

- Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- Confident individuals who lead safe and healthy lives
- Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

The relationship between these very broad aims and the subject of geography is explored in the web-based supporting guidance (www.qca.org.uk/secondarycurriculumreview/subject/ks3/geography/index.htm). With QCA now advising teachers to 'ask not what the curriculum can do for your subject, ask what your subject can do for the curriculum' (Waters, 2007), it is increas-

ingly likely that school senior leadership teams will challenge departments to show how they contribute to the 'curriculum lenses' and 'curriculum dimensions' of this key stage (Figure 1).

The importance of geography statement

The importance statement has been extensively rewritten and can be a very powerful starting point for curriculum planning. Use it to ask some searching questions of your current curriculum (Figure 2).

Key concepts

A very significant change for many departments is the more explicit reference to the key concepts of the subject. Although not intended to be taught separately or directly, these ideas *underpin the learning* and bring coherence and meaning to the selected content. So, while a sequence of work entitled 'Scale' is to be discouraged, it is hoped that students will develop an understanding of the way in which scale influences our perception of all geographical phenomena, and how 'zooming in and out' using the geographical lens can enhance our understanding of the world.

For many teachers, the greater emphasis on concepts will provide the greatest challenge for curriculum planning.

Key processes

These are the skills and 'ways of working' at which we expect KS3 learners to become more adept. The importance of fieldwork is restated, as is the centrality of enquiry. Note also the appearance of graphicacy, which includes the handling of geographical data through the use of geographical information systems (GIS). GIS is increasingly being viewed as an *entitlement* for all students rather than an optional extra or curriculum enrichment opportunity.

Curriculum lenses	Curriculum dimensions
<p><i>Curriculum aims</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ successful learners ■ confident individuals ■ responsible citizens <p><i>Personal development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Every Child Matters ■ personal well-being ■ economic well-being <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ personal, learning and thinking skills ■ functional skills 	<p>Global dimension</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Cultural understanding/diversity</p> <p>Technology/media literacy</p> <p>Enterprise</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Aesthetic</p>

Figure 1: Curriculum lenses and curriculum dimensions.

Does your curriculum:	Very well	Quite well	Poorly
Stimulate an interest in, and a sense of wonder about, places?			
Make sense of a complex and dynamically-changing world?			
Explain how places and landscapes are formed?			
Explain how people and environment interact?			
Explain how a diverse range of economies and societies are interconnected?			
Build on students' own experiences?			
Investigate at all scales from personal to global?			
Encourage questioning, investigation and critical thinking?			
Include fieldwork?			
Teach students to think spatially, using maps, visual images and new technology including GIS?			
Inspire students to become global citizens?			

Figure 2: Using the importance statement to review your curriculum.

It might be worth restating here that a suitably-formed enquiry is the most powerful vehicle for developing knowledge and understanding of the subject, and is not simply a 'bolt on' for skills development. An enquiry approach helps us to select suitable content and appropriate geographical questions in order to tackle an issue or theme in a distinctly geographical way.

Range and content

The revised breadth of study section is far less prescriptive about choice of content than earlier versions of the PoS. There is an opportunity here to breathe new life into your KS3 curriculum by choosing geographical approaches (place studies, themes or issues) that suit your learners; by selecting content that will enthuse, engage, deepen understanding of key concepts and promote the development of skills.

This increased flexibility is also a challenge to geography teachers. It is a recognition that we are the curriculum planners, and that our task, within the National Curriculum framework, is to select suitable content and explore it with our learners at an appropriate breadth and depth. This is no 'tick list' approach to teaching the subject and involves some careful thinking.

Curriculum opportunities

The curriculum opportunities section builds on earlier references to the use of fieldwork, enquiry, ICT and maps. It outlines more clearly the expected outcomes of some of this work. By referring to GIS, informed responsible action and geographical issues in the news, it also emphasises elements that may be lacking in your current curriculum.

Another aspect of this section is its reference to cross-curricular links. In order to meet QCA's goal of a more

coherent learning experience in KS3, work across subject disciplines seems increasingly likely. The challenge for geography departments will be to seek out opportunities where our subject can contribute to the wider curriculum – for example, education for global citizenship.

Planning across the key stage

The Programme of Study is a framework for planning, not a curriculum. In order to create a curriculum that works for you and your learners, a starting point could be a departmental discussion about what places, themes or issues your students should study in order to give them a solid grounding in the geography of the early twenty-first century.

The recent debate over 'significant' geography (Taylor and Catling, 2006) could be useful to your discussion. On what basis will you choose places, themes and issues for study? What makes something geographically significant for students aged 11–14?

- the scale of a feature, event, theme or issue?
- its geographical extent or the number of people it impacts upon?
- a location nearby or very far away?
- if it is new, or enduring?
- its importance for the future? – for whose future?
- its typicality? – its uniqueness? – its fragility?
- its topicality or relevance to the lives of students?
- its relevance to wider themes such as global citizenship?

Many geographers perceive climate change, globalisation, migration and the exploitation and exhaustion of resources as powerful 'issues for our times'. Themes such as urbanisation may be newly significant – with 2007 being the first year when more humans become urban rather than rural dwellers. Some places around the world, such as China and India, seem to be growing in economic and cultural 'significance'. Other places, such as the Middle East (West Asia), possess an enduring geopolitical importance. Which issues, themes and places should appear in your revised curriculum?

In the light of this discussion, and your review of the importance statement in the PoS, your department will need to consider:

- What do we keep?
- What do we change?
- What do we remove?
- What do we add in?
- How can we contribute to wider learning?

It should also be noted that changes to the key stage can be 'rolled out' from 2008, starting perhaps with year 7. Alternatively, you might choose to revise the entire key stage curriculum at once.

Planning a sequence of work

One way into the curriculum-planning process might be to consider how you intend to make use of the key concepts in planning a sequence of lessons over the medium term.

Taylor (2007) summarises the use of concepts very neatly and shows how planning using concepts can bring greater purpose to the study of geography (Figure 3).

- Traditionally, geography schemes of work have been organised around places or themes as their focus.
- Where this pattern of organisation has been insufficiently thoughtful, the subject has been perceived as an accumulation of content knowledge or 'stuff'.
- A content-led approach can leave students wondering what the subject is about and what relevance the seemingly random selection of 'stuff' has to their lives and their intellectual development.
- Concepts are the 'building blocks' in the process of making sense (understanding).
- Concepts such as space and place are the things (the 'substance') that geographers ask questions about.
- Concepts such as interdependence, environmental interaction, physical & human processes and diversity underpin the questions that geographers ask or the way they approach the content (the 'syntax'). They inform the things geographers want to know about the content or substance.
- Concepts therefore shape our understanding of what geographers study (the substance) and how they study it (the syntax).

Figure 3: An interpretation of key points on the use of concepts. Source: Taylor, 2007.

Three further conclusions around concepts can be drawn from Taylor's work:

1. Overarching 'substantive' concepts such as place are so broad as to appear of little use to curriculum planning. In order to make use of these concepts, we must be conscious of the fact that they are open to very many different geographical interpretations. Be clear about the focus you wish to develop. For example, is a sequence of work intended to develop an understanding that places are contested, that places are connected, that people can be seen to belong or not to belong to places, or another perspective entirely? Make your preferred approach explicit in your planning and teaching.

Overall purpose of the learning

For learners to understand competing demands on space; to appreciate the value of their local park or green space; to express informed opinions about its current state and future development.

The place, theme or issue to be used (the content focus)

The local park or green space in the context of the concept of a 'park'.

Key understandings learners will develop (drawn from the key concepts)

- The concept of a 'park' is wide-ranging and includes wild landscapes, tended gardenscapes and modern retail and industrial zones.
- The concept of a park is often used to conjure images of naturalness and peacefulness. This concept does not always bear close scrutiny.
- People can perceive and use the same space in very different ways.
- The interactions between different groups of people, and between people and the environment, can be challenging to manage and resolve.
- The successful resolution of these challenges is worthwhile in order to sustain valuable landscape resources and balance the needs of recreation and conservation.

Key processes learners will draw upon and develop

- Investigation, through primary and secondary information, of the different ways people perceive and use the same environment/landscape resource.
- Fieldwork investigation of the location, use, conflict and management of a local park/green space.
- Internet research and interviews to establish the Green Flag status of a local park (see Figure 5).
- Use of ICT to communicate findings and recommend future actions about the use of a local park.

Key questions that relate to key understandings

- Enquiry question: A Green Flag for our local park?
- What are 'parks' and what are they for?
- Where is our local park or green space?
- What do we think about this park?
- What do we use it for?
- Who else uses the park and what else is it for?
- Who owns and manages the park?
- How do people affect the park?
- How are conflicts between different users resolved?
- How can the needs of recreation and conservation be met in the same space?
- What makes a 'successful' park?
- Does our local park have a Green Flag Award?
- Does it deserve one and how can we help get it?

Range of sources of information

- Photographs of national, retail, industrial, country, science and other 'parks'
- Map information about local and other parks
- Fieldwork data on local park environment, facilities, users and management
- Interview with Parks Department representative
- Interviews with members of local community
- Green Flag Award website

Assessment activity

Management plan and accompanying letter to Parks Department to attain Green Flag status for local park.

Curriculum statement (what learners know, understand and are able to do)

- Know a range of examples of types of park
- Know the location of the local park and its facilities, uses, ownership and Green Flag status
- Understand why different groups perceive and use parks in different ways
- Understand how the local park is managed to resolve competing aims and sustain its use, landscape and environment
- Understand the role they can play in maintaining the park and sustaining it in future
- Be able to pose relevant questions about the park, and identify and use suitable sources of information
- Be able to communicate their feelings and recommendations clearly, using ICT where appropriate.

Figure 4: Planning grid using concepts (after Lambert, 2007).

Green Flag criteria		Score				
		1	2	3	4	5
Welcoming	Equal access for all the community					
	Good and safe access					
	Signs to and in the park					
Healthy, safe, and secure	Safe equipment and facilities					
	Toilets, drinking water, first aid, public telephones and emergency equipment					
	Secure for all the community to use or cross					
	Measures to prevent dog fouling					
Clean and well maintained	Litter and other waste management					
	Grounds, buildings, equipment and other features					
	Maintenance, and measures to deal with vandalism					
Sustainable	Gardening standards					
	Issues of pesticide and peat use					
	Plant waste recycling					
	Energy conservation, pollution reduction, waste recycling					
Conservation and heritage	Landscape features					
	Buildings and structural features					
	Natural features and wildlife					
Community involvement	Use by the community					
	Recreation facilities for all the community					
	Community involvement in management					
Marketing	Promotion of the park					
	Information to users					
Totals						
Overall score						

Figure 5: An abridged version of the Green Flag criteria.

- Use 'syntactic' concepts to help frame geographical questions or approaches to the content you have selected. Are you intending students to gain a better understanding of how processes lead to change (now and in future), why phenomena are distributed and located in a particular way, or how places or environments may be connected to one another?
- By selecting a suitable enquiry question, direct learners in a purposeful way to develop their knowledge and understanding of substantive concepts, using conceptual approaches that will be of future use in their geographical learning.

Lambert (2007) has built upon the Geographical Association 'Where will I live?' project to develop very clear advice on planning using concepts. The planning grid (Figure 4) is based on this work. The author has added an exemplar to the grid, based on enquiry work into the concept of a 'park'.

Conclusion

A very significant amount of curriculum change is upon us, with a revised key stage 3 curriculum (from 2008), new A level specifications (from 2008) and new GCSE specifications (from 2009). As departments manage this change, it is important to recognise the crucial role played by the key stage 3 curriculum in laying a foundation for future studies and encouraging learners to continue with geography post-14.

Careful thought therefore needs to be given to planning an engaging, challenging and coherent geography curriculum. Although the solutions are likely to be local and diverse, the Geographical Association and other networks will be crucial in developing and sharing ideas. If we are successful at doing this, the overall impact of the revised Programme of Study will be to reinvigorate our subject and empower those teaching and learning it. ■

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