

# Planning Your Key Stage 3 Curriculum

**Eleanor Rawling** assesses the opportunities provided by the revised key stage 3 curriculum.

*'Last year we made radical reforms to the geography curriculum to make it more engaging and more relevant to young people's lives', (Jim Knight, Schools Minister, 2008).*

*'Greater flexibility for schools to tailor teaching and learning'. (QCA, 2008).*

But can we believe this rhetoric? Is the new freedom really apparent?

In my view, the new Programme of Study (PoS) does have potential to make a difference but – a big but – only if geography teachers are clear about how to use the new requirements and are given the space and time to undertake their own school-based curriculum development. *Planning Your Key Stage 3 Geography Curriculum* (Rawling, 2008) is the title of a book I've just written to encourage you to find this newly proclaimed freedom to exercise your own professional skills and judgement and so to reconnect with the excitement of curriculum development. Curriculum development may be defined as:

*'The process of planning and developing the curriculum content and the experiences that students are to receive in schools in order to help them make progress in geography, enjoy the experience and appreciate the relevance of geography to their own lives... Planning suggests organising and sorting out material, often that which is already provided, whereas developing implies taking things forward beyond what is stated and provided' (Rawling, 2008).*

To clarify how the revised key stage 3 curriculum provides these opportunities is my aim in this article.

## The key stage 3 PoS explained

The new PoS sets out to outline the underlying structure of the subject in

terms of key concepts, processes and skills for geography and it provides greater flexibility of content choice than earlier versions. On the other hand, it is not very clear about what the different elements of the PoS mean or how to use the flexibility. As you read the PoS you may be asking:

- Where do I start?
- Is there any minimum required content?
- Are the concepts the same as the content?
- If not where is the content?
- What do I do with concepts?
- How do I use the curriculum opportunities?

As a first step to understanding, remember that the revised programmes of study in all subjects follow a common format. After Curriculum Aims for the whole curriculum, there are for each subject the following items:

- Importance Statement
- Key Concepts
- Key Processes
- Range and Content
- Curriculum Opportunities
- Level Descriptions.

There are also explanatory notes which elaborate and expand on the information given in all the other sections.

One way of thinking about all this is to see the whole PoS as answering a sequence of questions (interpreted for geography in Figure 1).

In my book, I have provided a commentary about each element of the PoS. This makes clear that the concepts are quite distinctive, summarising big ideas that underlie the whole curriculum. They do not indicate specific content to be taught, nor are they necessarily the place to start planning. I have produced a double-page spread simpli-

fying and expanding the National Curriculum requirements into a 'ready-to-use version' of the PoS (Rawling 2008, p. 20-1). Figure 2 is an extract from this, highlighting the content requirements and explaining the criteria for expanding and developing the content yourself. Note that the list of content that must be included is not a list of headings for units of work. Your curriculum may be planned around any mix of questions, issues, topics, places, themes – as suits your intentions – as long as it gives access to the required content. (For example curriculum plans see Rawling, 2008, pp. 35-7 and Figure 5 here).

What is the whole curriculum aiming to achieve?

What is the broad context within which learning takes place?

(CURRICULUM AIMS)

What distinctive contribution can geography make to the education of young people at KS3?

(IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY)

What is it about the underlying structure and approach of the subject that will allow it to do this?

What are some of the big ideas and concepts?

What are the distinctive approaches and skills?

(KEY CONCEPTS AND KEY PROCESSES)

What content must be covered in the KS3 course?

(RANGE AND CONTENT)

What criteria should be used when selecting further KS3 content and specific topics/experiences?

(RANGE AND CONTENT)

What other opportunities must be addressed when planning?

(CURRICULUM OPPORTUNITIES)

What learning outcomes are expected of students as a result of this curriculum?

(LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS)

Figure 1: The Programme of Study as a sequence of questions.

Item	What it means for you (author's interpretation)	Section of the PoS in which it is found
<p>Minimum content</p> <p>What must 11–14 year olds study at KS3? – the initial required content to which your own selection can be added</p>	<p><i>At KS3 students must be taught through a combination of studies in overview and studies in depth. In order to give students a secure framework of people, place and environment, the choice of content should ensure that all students can understand the changing character and significance of their own community and of the UK in the wider world. They should also be aware of the major global, environmental, cultural and economic issues affecting the world's people, and of the broad location and significance of places and events in the news.</i> (this statement is based on the explanatory notes and importance of geography statement)</p> <p>Within these broad parameters, KS3 geography should include for all students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Key aspects of the UK, its changing human and physical geography, current issues and place in the world today</li> <li>■ Physical geography, physical processes and natural landscapes</li> <li>■ Human geography, built and managed environments and human processes</li> <li>■ Interactions between people and their environments, including causes and consequences, and how to plan for and manage future impacts</li> <li>■ Fieldwork investigations in different locations outside the classroom, individually and as part of a team</li> <li>■ The location of places and environments (locational knowledge)</li> </ul> <p>(NB these are not a list of unit headings, only a reminder of what content your planned curriculum must give access to)</p>	<p>RANGE AND CONTENT</p>
<p>Criteria for curriculum planning</p> <p>What are the criteria that should guide you when planning the curriculum and selecting further content?</p>	<p>When selecting content and planning your curriculum you must ensure that the material chosen includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ a variety of scales</li> <li>■ investigations focused on places, themes and issues</li> <li>■ reference to different parts of the world in their wider settings and contexts, including the EU and countries or regions in different states of development</li> <li>■ real and relevant contemporary contexts</li> <li>■ issues of relevance to the UK and globally</li> </ul> <p><i>Add any of your own criteria...</i></p>	<p>RANGE AND CONTENT CURRICULUM OPPORTUNITIES</p>
<p>Kinds of experience</p> <p>What other opportunities and experiences must be addressed when planning the curriculum?</p>	<p>KS3 courses and schemes of work must provide opportunities for students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ build on their personal experiences of geography</li> <li>■ use a range of approaches to enquiry</li> <li>■ use varied resources, including maps, visual media and geographical information systems</li> <li>■ undertake fieldwork investigations in different locations outside the classroom, individually and as part of a team</li> <li>■ participate in informed responsible action in relation to geographical issues that affect them and those around them</li> <li>■ make links between geography and other subjects, including citizenship and ICT, and areas of the curriculum including sustainability and the global dimension</li> </ul> <p><i>Add any of your own criteria...</i></p>	<p>CURRICULUM OPPORTUNITIES</p>

## Concepts and curriculum planning

Concepts are a crucial element of the new PoS and yet there has been a great deal of misunderstanding and confused debate about these. Seven key concepts are listed in the PoS:

- Place
- Space
- Scale
- Environmental interaction and sustainable development
- Process (physical or human)
- Interdependence
- Cultural understanding and diversity.

There has been talk of a new 'concept-based curriculum' as if concepts were not present at all in other versions of the National Curriculum, and of the need for 'concept-based curriculum planning' as if a completely different approach is required. As far as I am concerned, neither of these is the case. The main difference within the curriculum requirements is that concepts have been explicitly recognised, whereas in earlier versions, they tended to be hidden – for example, in the 1999 PoS, in headings (e.g. knowledge and understanding of place(s)), in generalisations (e.g. to explain the physical and human features that give rise to the distinctive character of places) or in level descriptions (e.g. they appreciate the many links and relationships that make places dependent on each other, level 6).

The 2007 PoS states that 'pupils need to develop understanding of these (key concepts) in order to deepen and broaden their knowledge, skills and understanding'. The trouble is that this sounds as if understanding and learning about a concept is the first step to 'deepen knowledge and broaden understanding'. In fact, it is more likely to be the other way round – as students deepen their knowledge and broaden their understanding of geographical matters they will gradually reach awareness and gain understanding of the big ideas or concepts of the discipline. This is not a pedantic bickering about words but an alternative interpretation which will lead to a wholly different approach to curriculum planning. The key stage 3 PoS seems to give the impression that you should start from the concepts – hence 'concept-based planning'. My view is that you should not start planning with concepts and that there is no such thing as concept-based planning; the planning and development process is essentially the same as it always was. Clarifying the

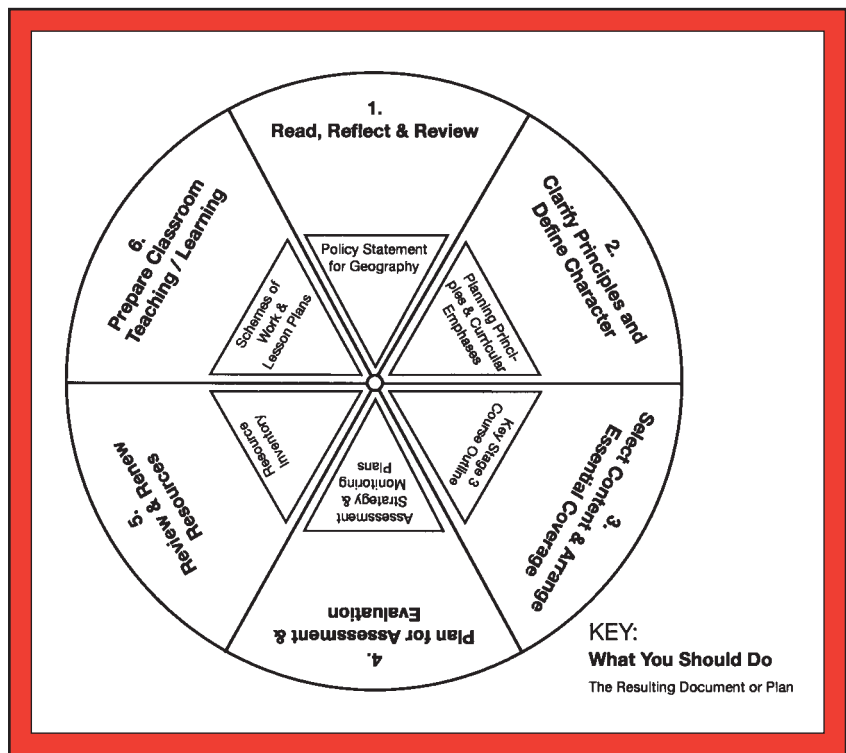


Figure 3: The Curriculum Planning Circle.

principles and character of your course leads to a selection of content and development of teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Of course, all these stages need to be underlain by a sound understanding (shown by you the teacher, and eventually one hopes reached by the students!) of the key concepts, skills and processes of geography and particularly of those highlighted for key stage 3. Figure 3 – The Curriculum Planning Circle – draws on Chapter 5 of the book, showing one well-established route to curriculum planning. It is presented in a circular diagram to show that there are many different starting and finishing points in creative curriculum planning – spin the circle at a departmental planning meeting and discuss the planning process, using where it lands as a starting point! Wherever you start, the stage of content selection is now crucial – because the curriculum is more open and much less constrained by the central guidelines. This is where your expertise as a geographer really makes a difference.

### So what use are concepts?

The subject, geography, in all its diversity, is your main resource to draw on when planning the curriculum and the key concepts provide one exciting way into this. Concepts are said to form the structure or skeleton underlying the whole Programme of Study (indeed the whole of geography at any key stage). Your students are intended to develop understanding of them gradually as they study the places and topics you have chosen. The concepts and ideas of

the subject represent economies of thought which are useful if geography is not just to be a mass of memorised fact. You will need to bear in mind these big ideas when selecting content, planning teaching and learning, and devising assessment. Concepts are not something to teach to students directly, nor will you wish to hand out definitions for them to learn. They do not imply a set selection of content, nor will you need to produce units of work entitled 'Place', 'Space', 'Scale' etc. (though you might have units of work designed to bring out particular concepts – e.g. a unit on the UK designed to draw out understanding of place and interdependence). What you will need to do is ensure that you understand what is meant by each of the key concepts, so you can start thinking creatively about the kinds of teaching and learning experiences your students will need if they are ever going to understand them as well.

To help you do this, *Planning Your Key Stage 3 Geography Curriculum* has allocated a full page table (see Figure 4) to each of the seven 'required' key concepts, addressing the following questions:

- What is it? Why are geographers interested in it?

A brief commentary on the concept and reference to some geographers whose writings currently elucidate the topic. An encouragement to find out more about the latest ideas in the discipline and to keep the curriculum up-to-date.

CONCEPT	What it is What is it and why are geographers interested?	Experiences to provide If students are to gain understanding of this concept, they will need to be given these experiences at KS3:	Outcomes for students If KS3 students understand this concept they are likely to:
<p>PLACE</p> <p>Geographers writing about place: Doreen Massey Tim Cresswell* Noel Castree Stuart Lane</p> <p>* see Creswell in <i>Geography</i>, Oct 2008)</p>	<p>To geographers a place is a space with meaning. This term recognises the character and identity with which a place is imbued (often referred to as a 'sense of place') as a consequence of the meanings given to it by the people who live in it, use it and negotiate their lives in relation to it at all scales. How we think about places is shaped by and shapes our 'geographical imagination' or place image</p> <p>In physical geography, character and identity reflect local conditions that control the nature and rate of operation of processes. Places may be officially recognised geographical entities (e.g. a particular city) or more informally recognised sites of intersecting relationships, meanings and memories (e.g. Banglatown, the Brontë Country, chalk downlands)</p> <p>The concept of place, the uniqueness of particular places and the notion of place-based identities are ideas that are strongly contested in the context of increasing globalisation</p>	<p>The opportunity to undertake some in-depth study of real places at different scales (e.g. local places for different communities, a distinctive region or country) and in different kinds of environment (e.g. rural, urban, near, far-away)</p> <p>The chance to delve deeply into the different meanings, experiences and identities implicit in their own local place</p> <p>The opportunity to study situations where there is conflict/disagreement about living in or making changes to a place</p> <p>Experiences and intellectual challenges in relation to places in both natural and human settings</p> <p>Exposure to art, drama, music, literature or poetry about places in a variety of cultures</p> <p>Opportunity to make their own personal response to place or to an issue specific to a place, and to test out their mental images of places</p>	<p>Be able to write and talk knowledgeably about a place they have studied, recognising how its distinctive features (physical and human), and interactions between them, help to create its character</p> <p>Be able to generalise from specific examples to explain why and how places can become sites of conflict over meaning and identity</p> <p>Recognise and give examples of the diversity of places, the physical and human causes of similarity and difference and the changing cultural characteristics</p> <p>Be able to recognise and explain some of the links and relationships that make places dependent on each other at different scales</p> <p>Show some ability to develop and use a 'geographical imagination', to picture or imagine a place and to represent their ideas in a variety of less conventional forms (e.g. poetry, artwork, music, diary) as well as in traditional school modes</p>

Figure 4: Getting to know the key concept: Place.

- What teaching/learning experiences must be provided for students if they are to gain understanding of the concept?

Intended to highlight those experiences without which a student's understanding will be incomplete, rather than to provide an exhaustive list. Teachers can develop more ideas.

- What outcomes might be expected of KS3 students if they do understand this concept?

These are linked closely to the standards implied in the level descriptions, especially those at levels 5/6. Useful for developing formative and summative assessment.

confidence when planning both the broad outlines of your key stage 3 course and the details of teaching and learning. For example, if you want your students to understand the concept of Place, as opposed to knowing the details of one or two particular places, then it is necessary to ensure that at some stage they study a range of different kinds of places in their own right and not just as examples of thematic work. They will also need to explore the varied meanings and identities apparent in their own place and to be exposed to ways in which other people have written about and represented places. Ideally, they should be given opportunities to express their own responses to place in a variety of creative and informative ways. Figure 5 presents one example curriculum plan in which year 8 is focused on exploring place in a variety of exciting ways.

For further ideas about place, see the October 2008 issue of *Geography*.

### What kind of curriculum planner are you?

There is a great deal more in the book than can be referred to here – chapters on understanding the key stage 3 PoS, planning and developing your own curriculum, worked examples of key stage 3 plans, guidance about enquiry, progression and assessment. There are also some complementary web-based templates and resources available on the GA's website to those who have purchased the book.

However, I leave you with one light-hearted activity that, nevertheless, has a serious message. The way we approach planning anything new, whether it's the family holiday, buying a new house or the development of a new geography curriculum, reflects what kind of person (or geography department) we are. I was made suddenly aware of this when talking to a financial adviser. I noticed that he had a diagram characterising people on the

How we live now		Key concepts accessed	Experiences and Breadth of Study (examples)	PoS coverage	The school and its locality:
<p>Content selected for study</p> <p><b>Year 7 Skills for learning about the world (combined with History, PSHEE, RE)</b>  <i>Ways of finding out...</i> (maps, atlases, diagrams, use of ICT, internet, GIS, fieldwork, visual media, diaries/blogs, biography/travel writing, poetry/literature) ... <i>about the world around us</i>. All developed and practised through study of students' personal geographies, local geography, UK geography, other countries and issues in news. Content selection as relevant to students, school, topical concerns and to include human and physical.</p> <p><b>Year 8 Learning about places</b>  <i>Difficult places: physical</i> (mountains, arctic and deserts); <i>human</i> (war zones, places of conflict, refugee areas). <i>Imagined places</i> (places in myths, books, poetry, films). <i>Future places</i> (future cities, UK future, global futures, scientific futures). <i>A place for the future</i> (Africa).</p> <p><b>Year 9 Learning for citizenship</b>  <i>Global citizenship</i> (climate change, resources, development issues, trade and aid – trends/impacts, international measures). <i>National citizenship</i> (cultural diversity in UK, migration, housing, work, living together). <i>Local citizenship</i> (getting to know own place, issues and opportunities for action).</p>	<p>Space</p> <p>Scale</p> <p>Inter-dependence (others as appropriate to content)</p> <p>Place</p> <p>Process (physical and human)</p> <p>Environmental</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Cultural</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Interaction and Sustainability</p> <p>Inter-dependence</p> <p>Place</p> <p>Space</p> <p>Cultural</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Process (physical and human)</p>	<p>Opportunity to introduce students to a wide range of enquiry approaches, skills and techniques through selected content chosen from their own lives. Emphasis on students' social and educational development. Links with other subjects in a combined year 7 (history, PSHEE and economic well-being, RE). Visits outside school to local community and workplaces.</p> <p>Opportunity to emphasise place study and to stimulate/excite students via reference to books, films, items in the news and their own lives and imaginations. Range of resources especially books, film, poetry, myths. Africa (final unit) is a chance to consider the diversity, challenge and potential of this continent. Scale: zooming in/out, personal/global.</p> <p>Emphasis on citizenship, commitment and action. First unit: development issues and global/international initiatives, outside speakers. Second unit: stresses cultural diversity and investigates some UK issues/maps + GIS. Third unit: focuses on personal responsibility and local social, environmental and economic matters. Opportunity for fieldwork/projects/visits.</p>	<p>Geographical enquiry approach and skills throughout</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>range of studies of different parts of world and different environments</li> <li>UK geography and current issues</li> <li>location of places/environments</li> <li>personal/local study</li> <li>range of resources</li> <li>fieldwork/out-of-class activity in range of locations</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>studies based on places and regions</li> <li>current social/economic and environmental issues in UK and wider world</li> <li>some aspects of physical and human geography</li> <li>relevance to young people</li> <li>use of books, poetry, internet etc.</li> <li>studies of people/environment</li> <li>interactions, impacts and consequences at all scales</li> <li>issues of relevance to UK and globally</li> <li>fieldwork and voluntary work</li> <li>participate in informed, responsible action</li> </ul>	<p>A 'old' industrial town in northern England, now with significant redevelopment activities under way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The local population has high expectations of education, but it is not a wealthy area. Education is seen as a means of improvement</li> <li>Some mix of different ethnic groups but relatively well integrated and no major problems with language</li> <li>This is an improving school with standards rising and a strong emphasis on personal/social development as well as on academic achievement</li> <li>Recent changes have been made to the curriculum and year 7 now comprises a combined curriculum for the humanities and PSHEE focused on the theme of 'skills for learning about the world around us'. Years 8 and 9 still retain subjects but all have been asked to address relevance, employability and personal/social development (but see Figure 21 for developing year 9 as a topic-based curriculum)</li> </ul> <p><b>Aims and rationale for the course (an adventurous approach):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on using geography as the medium for the personal and social development of students while also exciting and inspiring them about the range and challenge of modern geography</li> <li>Go for a complete redesign of the KS3 course, using the new flexibility and the combined year 7 course as positive stimuli</li> <li>Students and their needs are the main curriculum focus</li> <li>Give new emphasis to learning about place, since this is seen as an essential ingredient in learning to live with others</li> </ul> <p><b>Planning principles and curricular emphases:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal, social and educational development of the students are the guiding design principles, along with ensuring a secure foundation of geographical knowledge</li> <li>In order to do this, some new areas of geography and education can be drawn on (e.g. personal geographies/students' experiences)</li> <li>Focus in year 7 on skills for learning, to emphasise skills, qualities and attitudes and the excitement of learning with traditional and modern technologies (cross-curricular dimensions – healthy lifestyles, identity and culture, creativity/critical thinking)</li> <li>Content will be selected each term from a mix of student-selected topics, local investigations, UK geography and topical international/global items, but care will be given to ensuring a progression in geographical ideas and vocabulary</li> <li>Year 8 will focus on learning about places emphasising this is key to geography and to world peace. The opportunity will be taken to study some unusual and interesting things (e.g. difficult places, imaginary places)</li> <li>Year 9 will focus on the challenges and responsibilities of citizenship at different scales</li> <li>Cross-curricular dimensions emphasised in years 8 and 9 are identity and culture, community participation, sustainable futures and global dimension</li> </ul>	

Figure 20 How we live now.

Figure 5: An example curriculum plan. Source: Rawling, 2008.

basis of their investment behaviour on a continuum, ranging from secure and cautious to adventurous and risk-taking. This seemed to be a useful way to consider curriculum planning as well so I borrowed the approach! You might like to look at Figure 6, derived from the investment behaviour diagram, and

place yourself or your department on this continuum. This is not meant to be critical in any way. All types of planning exist and provide perfectly good approaches to organising a curriculum. Some people prefer to take a cautious approach either because of their character and background or because the

school situation warrants this. Others thrive on taking risks or feel that the school will benefit from exploring new directions. You might find Figure 6 a thought-provoking way into a departmental planning meeting. Of course, the message is that, whatever kind of curriculum planner

CAUTIOUS	BALANCED	PROGRESSIVE	ADVENTUROUS (Risk-Taker)
<p>Our approach would be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ stay with the structure and well-established units that we know work well</li> <li>■ provide a secure base of knowledge and skills in physical/human geography</li> <li>■ only make essential changes as required by the new PoS</li> </ul>	<p>Our approach would be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ assume that some of our existing course will stay</li> <li>■ consider the new PoS and new ideas and add them alongside well-established units</li> <li>■ ensure that the new course is a balance of old and new</li> </ul>	<p>Our approach would be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ make a complete review of our course structure and content</li> <li>■ aim to draw on lots of new ideas and materials</li> <li>■ keep some existing topics and approaches, though tailoring them to new structure</li> </ul>	<p>Our approach will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ undertake a radical overhaul, starting from a clean slate</li> <li>■ take inspiration directly from academic geography and/or students' experiences</li> <li>■ go for new and innovative topics and materials, including some untried</li> </ul>

Figure 6: What kind of curriculum planner am I?

you are, the important thing is to base your decisions about what to teach and how to teach it on your best understanding of the subject, geography, and of its potential contribution to the education of your students. No one – not the government, not QCA, not the head teacher – is in a better position to do this than you, the geography teacher. Lambert and Morgan (2005) put this succinctly: ‘the starting point for curriculum design in geography should be a rigorous and defensible version of the subject matter to be taught in the light of teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the students they teach’.

Essentially the new curriculum provides the freedom for you to be a curriculum developer, and to use geog-

raphy to excite and interest your students and to prepare them for their futures. Go for it! ■

**References**

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