

Personal Support and Excellence: Parallel Lines?

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ABSTRACT

Despite the laudable aims and intentions of the Curriculum for Excellence, there is continuing uncertainty as to the role and function of Personal Support which has been effectively marginalised. Rather than emphasising its crucial role in underpinning and driving the four capacities, the Curriculum for Excellence currently seems ill at ease with Personal Support and its place in the new framework and there is a lack of any clear vision in terms of philosophy and structure. It is argued here that this policy vacuum and lack of direction is an inevitable result of three parallel and unconnected 'approaches' or ways of thinking which might be characterised thus:

- the 'Standards' approach, based on the recent National Review of Guidance
- the 'Curriculum-building' approach, based on a recent series of curricular policy documents produced by the Scottish Government
- the 'Excellence' approach, based on documentation produced by HM Inspectorate of Education

The paper will further argue that there is a pressing need for clarity of vision and of purpose.

INTRODUCTION

After some delay, the Government's much-heralded Curriculum for Excellence is beginning to take shape. The Curricular Areas are in place, the Experiences and Outcomes are in place and many schools are in the process of 'curricular transition'.

There is one aspect of school experience, however, where this transition has been particularly problematic, despite reassurances to the contrary from those charged with developing it. Personal Support (also known as Guidance or Pupil Support or Pastoral Care, depending on which agency or Local Authority is using the term) is not bearing up well in the restructuring thus far. Because it is not a Curricular Area, there are no Experiences and Outcomes, merely statements forming part of an Entitlement. Definitions, roles, remits, functions and, in particular, responsibilities remain uncertain, despite the fact that, until relatively recently, a very clear structure, founded on clear principles had been in place for more than 40 years. Similarly, there is currently no recognition of the central and crucial role of Guidance/Personal Support in delivering the four

'Capacities' which are seen as essential pillars of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive 2004).

Arguably, the problems with Guidance/Pupil Support began before the Curriculum for Excellence at the time of the original McCrone Report in 2000 and the subsequent 'Agreement' document in 2001 (Scottish Executive 2001a). These reports recommended (among other things) a restructuring of management structures and responsibilities in Scottish schools and consequently had a major impact on Scottish education. Significantly, these documents made very little reference to what was then known as Guidance, although from a reading of Annex B of the Agreement, it is reasonable to suggest that there were expectations that Principal Teacher posts in Guidance would continue. There was a feeling that McCrone's crime was one of omission rather than commission.

It might be argued then, that when a Government report published later that year - *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* (Scottish Executive 2001b) – recommended a National Review of Guidance, the outlook for Guidance (later re-named Personal Support) appeared to be optimistic. There appeared to be a recognition that support processes in school were important and might be combined and strengthened. Various groups and agencies were commissioned to provide research which would inform the thinking of the National Review Reference Group. (The author of this paper was a member of the Reference Group.)

It is significant, however, that while the National Review was in progress, schools lost Assistant Principal Teacher (APT) and Assistant Headteacher (AHT) posts as a result of the McCrone recommendations. Clearly, while schools waited for the National Review to point the way forward, they required to adapt Guidance structures in school following the McCrone recommendations, despite McCrone's virtual silence on Guidance. There was at that time (and there remains) debate about 'full time' Guidance/Personal Support staff in secondary schools and about the role of Personal & Social Education (PSE), First Level Guidance/Personal Support work and so on. Schools experimented with various Personal Support structures and the Review subsequently identified three very general models which schools had adopted while awaiting publication of the Review itself, i.e. Embedded, Integrated and Specialist (SEED 2005 Annex B: 43).

It is worth noting in passing that, although the National Review was charged with reviewing Guidance across Primary, Secondary and Special sectors, the term 'Guidance' had been used almost exclusively by the Secondary sector. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) made an important contribution to the debate at the time and in a comprehensive report recommended the extension of 'Guidance' to Primary Schools and the establishment of promoted posts in this area (GTCS 2001). Unfortunately, the report never achieved the recognition it deserved and did not form part of the formal evidence gathered for discussion by the National Review team, although many of the GTC's recommendations did find their way into National Review policy, eg the need for a unified framework of support.

The National Review was ready for publication at the end of 2004 but was delayed until early 2005 (see below). There are several significant issues here for the purposes of this paper:

- In calling for a review, there was clearly a recognition that 40 years of successful Guidance provision should be recognised and, more importantly, built upon.
- The publication of the report was delayed for three months to allow the new Curriculum for Excellence documentation to be launched (SEED 2004). The Report of the National Review of Guidance (entitled *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential* was the first document to be published thereafter (SEED 2005).
- It was clear that the Review document and the processes which would evolve from it in schools were fundamental to the achievement of the four capacities – successful learners etc. – which were themselves the building blocks for Curriculum for Excellence:-

Only when children and young people are safe and happy in school will they become successful learners...responsible citizens...etc (SEED 2005: 6)

- It might be argued that the Review tried to cover too many areas and too many sectors and as a result was very generalised. Most importantly, it provided a set of principles in the form of 'Standards', but made very little reference to established Guidance work and was relatively vague on structures and responsibilities, preferring instead to draw on examples of what schools had been doing while waiting for the Review report to be published.

It would seem therefore that, despite some vagueness in terms of detail, the thinking behind the National Review was fairly clear in that Guidance/Personal Support had a crucial role in the Curriculum for Excellence.

However, the journey to 'Excellence' has moved on and it appears that in an attempt to develop Personal Support, the position has become much less clear (ironically, perhaps, because of a desire to emphasise its importance to all staff). The Curriculum for Excellence campaign appears to be dealing with (at least) three approaches to Personal Support which, however well intentioned, merely serve to confuse because they are not connected in any obvious way and appear to be running along parallel lines, never destined to meet.

For the purposes of this paper I have called these three approaches:

- The Standards approach
- The Curriculum-Building approach
- The Excellence approach.

THE STANDARDS APPROACH

This way of approaching the Curriculum for Excellence sees Personal Support as central to the four Capacities. The term 'Personal Support' has become established largely because of an eponymous HMIE report commissioned to advise the *National Review* reference group (HMIE 2004). In fact, the term 'Personal Support' is often considered to be unhelpful because many staff who have no Guidance background understand it (at least initially) as supporting pupils who have personal problems, rather than appreciating it as an umbrella term which is intended to cover all aspects of Pupil Support, including curricular and vocational guidance, performance monitoring, and Personal and Social Education.

The Standards outlined in the National Review are intended to cover primary, secondary and special schools and, interestingly (and ambitiously), 'partner agencies providing learning opportunities and support...'. (SEED 2005: 10) The Standards are grouped under three broad themes:

Learning for Life	Standards 1-3
Review of Individual Progress	Standards 4-6
Access to Support	Standards 7-10

Each Standard has two subdivisions ('Outcomes' and 'Practice Issues') and a brief example (below) compiled from Annex A of the Report will be sufficient to illustrate this type of approach – an approach favoured at the time in a number of disciplines, including national policies on child protection.

Standard Number 7: Access to staff by children and parents who want support.

Outcomes for Children and Young People

Children, young people and parents feel confident that school staff will support them and understand the roles and remits of designated school staff and partner agencies

Practice Issues

- This commitment may be particularly important for children, young people and parents to understand if they view previous encounters with school negatively.
- A structure should be in place by which any member of staff who has been approached by a pupil can gain the support of senior Personal Support staff for advice and support.
- Schools should ensure that a key member of staff is responsible for ensuring that any support provided by a member of staff is recorded, monitored and followed through.

It can be argued that the Standards approach has its strengths in that it avoids any real prescription of methods, structures and responsibilities. Schools and Local Authorities (and, presumably, 'partner agencies') have to work out for themselves how to achieve the Standards. In an era of devolved accountability, this may be seen by some as a good thing. Examples of 'good practice' across the various sectors are included in the Review. Further examples of good practice were subsequently discovered across Scotland by a follow-up working group which produced two promotional videos for Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), the government-funded organisation charged with developing the curriculum in Scotland (Learning & Teaching Scotland 2007). (Interestingly, neither the Review document nor the good practice videostreams currently appear on the *Curriculum for Excellence* pages of the LTS website.)

For others, however, the determination to avoid anything which might be seen as prescriptive, in addition to the report's failure to clarify a whole range of issues (e.g. definitions/explanations of terms used - 'key staff', 'designated staff') and the failure to explain how Personal Support would develop the four capacities or address the issue of specific responsibilities might be seen as major weaknesses. Similarly, the provision of emerging or good practice exemplars does not effectively deal with the contentious issue of autonomous decision-making and the report's vagueness exacerbates the problem. Raffe (2009), in his discussion of flexibility & autonomy in a previous curricular development (the 16-18 Action Plan) points to lessons which might be learned from history. He makes several important points which might well be applied to the Curriculum for Excellence in general and which seem to have a particular resonance for Personal Support:

Experience since the Action Plan has demonstrated that flexibility is not the simple panacea it is often expected to be...Above all, flexibility should be balanced against other objectives: it cannot be the main principle of educational provision... (p31)

And further:

As the recent O.E.C.D. Review confirmed, the comprehensive school is one of the strengths of Scottish education, and its strength rests on the clarity of its institutional mission and the consistency of standards and provision across institutions. This clarity and consistency are potentially threatened by greater local autonomy, by the encouragement of school-based innovation and by the emerging variation in patterns of school-college partnership. Desirable as these things may be, we must be careful that they do not unintentionally undermine the core strengths of comprehensive education. (p31)

Despite its vagueness (or 'flexibility'), The National Review document was clearly intended to be part of the Curriculum for Excellence. The Standards, broad and general as they were, provided a basis on which to build bridges into the capacities and from these into the Journey to Excellence. There was also the possibility of linking to Entitlements and clarifying the relationship between a) Personal Support and the 'Curricular Area' of Health and Wellbeing and b) Personal Support and Personal & Social Education.

However, none of this has happened. At a recent Curriculum for Excellence Personal Support Conference (June 2009), the audience was informed that the document was now considered to be 'limiting', although this was not clarified. If the term implies some kind of restriction on potential practice, then it is difficult to see how it might apply in this situation. Quite the reverse may be the case. Its limitations may lie in its lack of precision and detail. Further, the 'Autumn Update' from Learning & Teaching Scotland on Personal Support signals the end of the Standards approach of the *Happy, Safe* document (ie the National Review Report) which has clearly lost ground in the competitive policy arena:

There is a recognition of change in policy direction in personal support from the ten standards for personal support provided in 'Happy, Safe & Achieving their Potential' to a broader definition required to meet the commitment in 'Building the Curriculum 3'(LTS 2009)

This paper will return to the policy change later but for the moment it is enough to note two points. Firstly, if the Standards are already rather vague and generalised, one wonders how helpful 'a broader definition' is likely to be. Secondly, there is some confusion: there is to be an official policy move towards *Building the Curriculum 3* and away from Standards but *Building the Curriculum 3* clearly notes that the Standards are very important.

Theoretically, the National Review report and the Standards approach are part of the Curriculum for Excellence but there is little doubt that both have lost favour with the policy-makers. This appears to have happened at the same time as other approaches to Pupil Support have emerged. Rather than building on the issues raised in the National Review, these 'Approaches' appear to be following quite separate, independent routes.

THE CURRICULUM-BUILDING APPROACH

Having established a framework for Personal Support in the National Review, followed by a two year period in which an Implementation Group travelled the country gathering examples of good practice – followed by the production of two video resources, it might reasonably be assumed that links would be made between the Standards and the rest of Curriculum for Excellence. Instead, the curriculum planners, perhaps inevitably, concentrated their efforts on the eight 'Curricular Areas' (often referred to as 'modes' - a term which finds no favour with planners but which is entirely accurate).

For Pupil Support, this ought to have presented an opportunity. *Building the Curriculum 1* (SEED 2006) is entirely focused on links between the Curricular Areas and the four 'Capacities' which are central to the Curriculum for Excellence. Indeed, these links are spelled out within each Curricular Area. It would have been an important step forward if additional links had been established between the Curricular Areas and Personal Support, indicating how each Area helps to support pupils and to deliver the Standards, and vice-versa. It seems illogical to argue the Personal Support is the responsibility of all staff and then to detach it from everyday life in the classroom.

The *Building the Curriculum* documentation seemed at best uncertain what to do with Pupil Support in general and the Standards in particular. For some time, Personal Support appeared under the Curricular Area of 'Health and Wellbeing' in the LTS website, which seemed strange, given all of the above and given the Government's own definition of Health and Wellbeing in *Building the Curriculum 1*:

Health and Wellbeing includes experiences and outcomes for personal and social development, understanding of health, physical education and physical activity, and contributions from home economics. It also includes approaches and activities such as physical activity and nutrition, planned by preschool settings, schools or colleges to promote the health and wellbeing of their learners and their community. (SEED 2006: 8)

In the event, this turned out to be a temporary (if unsuitable) home for Personal Support, although it appears have become a more permanent residence for PSE. It was clear that having largely ignored the National Review in its discussion of the Curricular Areas and having failed to 'lodge' Personal Support satisfactorily under 'Health and Wellbeing', other means of dealing with it had to be found.

If Personal Support was not to be directly related to each of the Curricular Areas and was not itself a Curricular Area with its own experiences and outcomes, then another approach was required – hence the concept of 'Entitlements'. Entitlements are not a new idea and many practitioners will remember the Guidance Entitlements of the early 1990s. In those days, the debate centred on precisely how (in terms of time and role allocation) to deliver the requirements clearly specified in the seminal documents *More than Feelings of Concern* (SCCC. 1986) and *Effective Learning & Teaching: Guidance* (HMI 1996). Similarly, the *Managing Guidance* documentation at the time dealt specifically and at some length with this. (SOED.1994: Unit B)

The 2008 version of 'Entitlement' naturally does not pursue this issue too far. In common with almost all of the thinking about Pupil Support thus far, there is no attempt to detail anything very specific:

Every child and young person is entitled to Personal Support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence can provide. (Scottish Government 2008: 17)

There are echoes of the National Review when the Entitlement briefly mentions meeting needs, removing barriers and there is mention of a mentor who can discuss pupils' learning. Interestingly, there is one direct reference to the Review and the Standards but there is no further explanation or development:

These standards continue to be important and establishments will need to plan to ensure that all children and young people receive the Personal Support which they require to become successful learners, confident individuals.....etc. (p18)

However, there has been a very recent change in policy direction away from the Standards to the 'broader definition required to meet the commitment in *Building the Curriculum 3*' (L.T.S 2009) – a document which recognises the importance of the Standards! This latest position is extremely important and worth quoting

in full since it seems to embody many of the problems which have beset Personal Support for some time. It emanates from the Scottish Government Policy Group:

The work of the policy group will support the delivery of the overarching strategies of Early Intervention, Early Years, Health Inequalities and Anti-poverty strategies as the core agreed priorities included in every single outcome agreement. It will also help deliver key national outcomes for the children and young people including the four capacities.

It draws together the full range of approaches and frameworks across 25 policy areas. There is a recognition of change in policy direction in personal support from the ten standards for personal support provided in 'Happy, Safe & Achieving their Potential' to a broader definition required to meet the commitment in 'Building the Curriculum3' (LTS 2009)

Two things are important here. Firstly, what I have called the 'Building the Curriculum' approach has generally developed as a parallel, almost independent line of thinking which has placed Personal Support firstly in 'Health and Wellbeing', then in a period of limbo and which finally (if briefly) seemed to acknowledge its importance by creating the Standards. However, Personal Support as a process is far less developed in this Curriculum-building approach, mainly because, as has already been noted, there is no attempt to merge the Curricular Areas, the four Capacities and the ten Standards or to engage in any form of mapping exercise or bridge-building.

Secondly, the rather vague ideas in the National Review and its Standards could potentially be replaced by yet more policy statements drawn from some 25 policy areas. Similarly, the Government Policy Group will be supported by a Network with a Steering Group and Pilot projects – all of which replicates the procedures and structures of the National Review as part of the Curriculum for Excellence. It is hard to imagine the logic of the thinking here.

THE EXCELLENCE APPROACH

In the midst of all this, yet another parallel approach has emerged which, although officially concerned with Personal Support, seems to have little direct connection with the documentation, terminology and thinking to date. Observers might be forgiven for thinking that HMIE's 'Journey to Excellence' and the subsequent Quality Indicators were developed independently of the two other approaches identified in this paper, although this was clearly not intended to be the case.

A look at the Inspectorate's ten 'Dimensions of Excellence' (H.M.I. 2006: 20) illustrates the initial difficulties for Pupil Support. Immediately, it is clear that Personal Support does not appear as one of the ten dimensions, which is unfortunate, given the assertion that 'each of the ten dimensions relates to key processes within the school' (p21). This was published one year after the National Review Standards but there are no references to them or to the central place of Personal Support in the development of the four Capacities. There is one Dimension (Number 9): 'Wellbeing and Respect' (pp101-3) - which merits a

closer look, however. (NB: This appears to be a different wellbeing from the Curriculum Area known as 'Health and Wellbeing'.) The closest this Dimension gets to what might be called Personal Support is a subsection of Dimension 9 entitled 'Supporting Children and Young People' (p107). A small number of recognisable issues are identified here e.g. 'Sensitive Personal Support; Providing Care and Support for Individuals'. However, once again, this is unrelated to either the Standards approach outlined in this paper or to the Curriculum-building approach. Further, it appears to be part of a subsection of the Journey to Excellence. For many, this is too fragmented and lacks the profile which Pupil Support ought to have if the Capacities and the Curricular Areas are to be properly delivered.

This notion that Personal Support has been reduced to a tiny cog in a large machine is further reinforced in *How Good is our School?* (HMIE 2007), Part 3 of the Inspectorate's *Journey to Excellence* series. In fact, the problem is compounded here because this document introduces yet another area or heading (5.8: 'Care, Welfare and Development') under which three (and only three) Pupil Support issues are listed (HMIE 2007: 34). An electronic scan of the entire document reveals that the term 'Personal Support' is nowhere to be found. This is particularly unhelpful, given that HGIOS 3 is almost certain to be the main point of reference for schools attempting to evaluate their own provision. It is not at all clear what it is they are meant to evaluate their Pupil Support provision against – Standards? Capacities? Entitlements? Dimensions? Wellbeing? Care and Welfare? The situation is more than a little confused.

CONCLUSIONS

The three parallel approaches to Personal Support outlined in this paper appear to be continuing apace. As has been argued, there have been no signs of any mapping or of any bridge building or, indeed, of any coherent plan for this aspect of pupil experience and, as such, a major opportunity may have been overlooked. 'Entitlements' are being heavily emphasised at the moment and there is a strong emphasis on reminding staff that everyone has a role in supporting pupils. Indeed, this seems to be the one area where all are agreed. However, this is hardly new and the debate and discussion must be pushed beyond the occasionally rather vague assertions that all staff should take responsibility. Clearly, it is important to emphasise that all staff should be concerned about their pupils' welfare but, as history tells us, it is about more than feelings of concern. Unless and until there is a much clearer outline of principles, structures and responsibilities (in particular, the notion of specific responsibility for individual pupils and for caseloads), there is a danger that Personal Support will become tokenistic. There is certainly a possibility that collective responsibility becomes a byword for a situation where many members of staff are in possession of a little information about individual pupils. Recent abuse cases highlighted in the media should alert us to the dangers of such an approach.

The Curriculum for Excellence seems at best unclear what to do about Personal Support and how it fits into the bigger picture. In fact it is rather unclear what we might mean by Personal Support at all and who might deliver it and how. These are all echoes of events in the early days of Guidance – events which eventually led to the publication of important documents such as *More than Feelings of Concern* (SCCC 1986) or *Effective Learning and Teaching in Guidance* (HMI 1996). Unlike the Curriculum for Excellence however, these documents saw Guidance as central to school life and addressed the matter directly. It has taken some 40 years to persuade an occasionally reluctant profession that Guidance/Personal Support should be a central part of pupil experience and there is a need to ensure that the planners do not lose sight of that.

More recent history is also repeating itself. In the last few months a Government Policy group (see above) has been set up and wishes to draw on 25 policy areas. A National Network Steering group has been set up to try and make sense of all of this and to consider key themes and current practice. Finally, pilot groups are operating in one local authority on ‘frameworks’. All of this was done just a few years ago as part of the National Review of Guidance. This approach, which tends to emphasise principles and frameworks which resonate across many areas, does not always recognise the need for more detailed examples and templates which individual institutions and managers might use. The National Review did not manage to resolve these tensions, it would seem. It remains to be seen whether the new groups will fare any better or whether wheels will be reinvented.

There may be some grounds for optimism in that one or two previously neglected issues are mentioned as ‘key’, most notably, perhaps, the need to further develop the role of the key adult who knows the child well. However, this sits uncomfortably among the determination to provide frameworks, policies, shared understandings and to avoid anything which might be construed as prescriptive. If the current Steering Group can avoid the temptation (and Government pressure) to produce yet more policies, there may be something to be retrieved from the current situation. If they can avoid misinterpreting ‘multi agency working’ as universal policymaking covering every conceivable sector and provider, then the situation may yet be resolved. Above all, if they can provide a practical framework which deals with structures, remits and responsibilities and which links Personal Support with the four Capacities, the Curricular Areas and HMIE’s interpretation of ‘Excellence’, Personal Support will be able to face the next forty years with renewed confidence

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