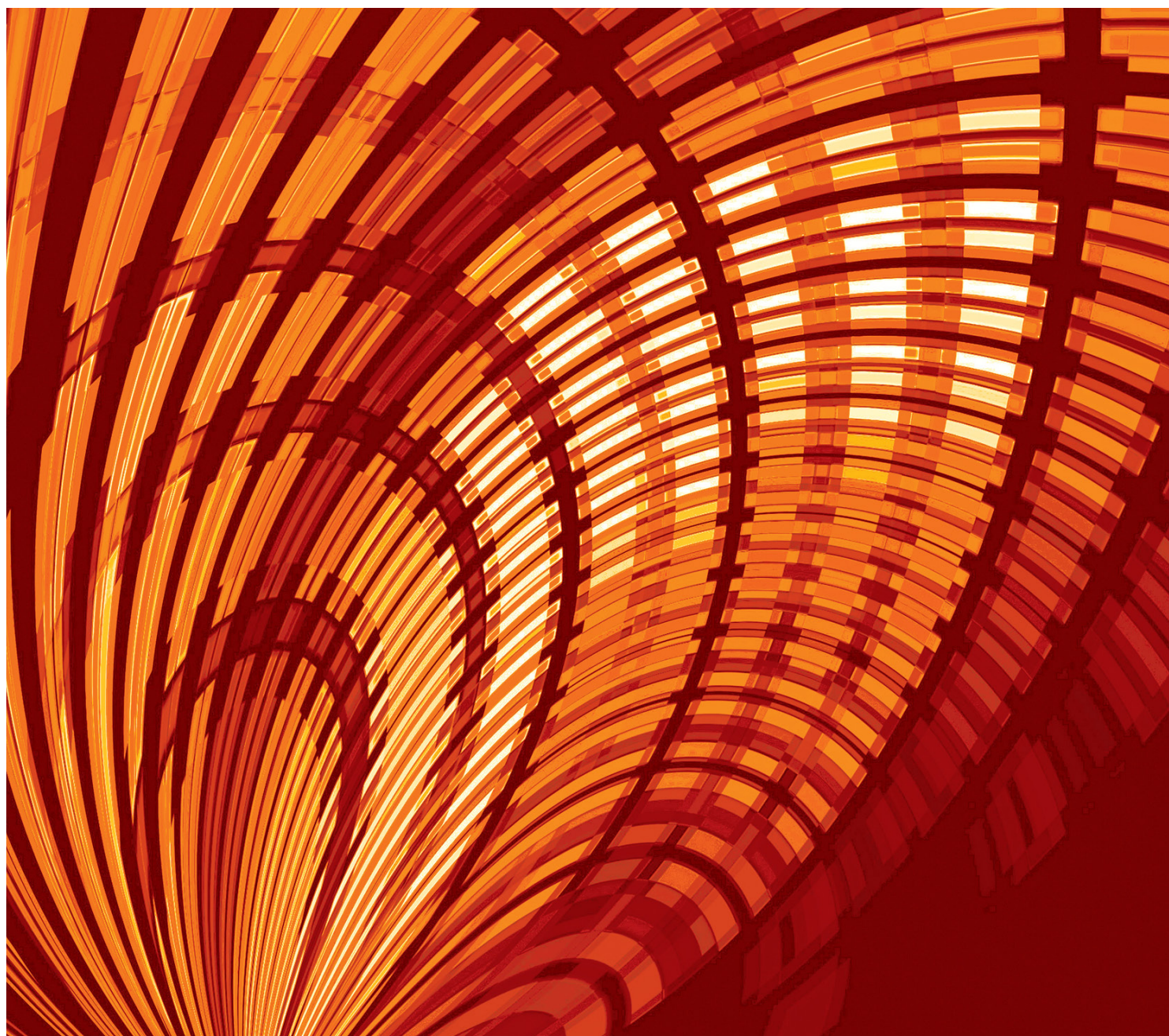


Moving from a supply-led to a demand-led curriculum in FE



Background and purpose of these stimulus materials

These materials have been developed from the findings of a 157 Group project, supported by LSIS, which focused on curriculum change in the FE sector. Seven FE colleges took part in individual action research projects exploring different aspects of curriculum change; the 157 Group then analysed their individual findings to produce a report, [Curriculum redesign in further education colleges: exploring current challenges and opportunities](#), which set out the key learning points from across the projects.

These materials have been developed in order to help the wider sector to use this learning - and some of the tools and models produced within the project - to explore and implement curriculum change in their own setting.

Curriculum change

The participants in the 157 Group project worked with a very broad definition of curriculum. They agreed at the outset that curriculum is much wider than simply the content of what is delivered or even how or when it is delivered; it also includes the individuals who undertake the delivery and their skills and capabilities. They defined the curriculum as relating to anything that affects the planned learning experience.

While each project was concerned with implementing a specific curriculum change in their own setting, they also set about identifying

- the factors that enable a college to facilitate curriculum change, in particular those that enable responsiveness - to learners, to communities and to employers
- challenges that need to be overcome in order to become more responsive.

These materials focus on these success factors, the challenges and ways to overcome them.

How to use these materials

The materials have been designed to stimulate discussion about curriculum change within colleges, to provide examples of practice and to prompt colleges to take action to build their capacity to implement curriculum change.

They could be used within senior management or departmental meetings or by a working group specifically tasked with increasing capacity to offer a demand-led curriculum. Staff could choose to focus on just one or two of the key findings from the 157 Group report, or to work their way through the full set of seven.

For each key finding, a set of self-assessment questions is provided. This should help colleges identify their current capacity to provide a demand-led curriculum and should signal some of the areas where improvements could be made. Also included for each key finding are examples of relevant practice from the seven projects undertaken by the colleges whose work is captured

the in 157 Group curriculum redesign report. Staff can click on the college name to take them through to the individual college project report or they can follow the additional hyperlinks to look at specific tools or models developed by the seven colleges as part of their curriculum redesign work.

To help staff move from discussion to action, a 'Moving Forward' chart is provided. This will enable colleges to identify actions that can be taken to improve their ability to implement curriculum change. Colleges could choose to focus on just one or two rows of this chart, corresponding with the key findings they have discussed, or to work collectively to identify actions against each of the seven areas identified as crucial to a college's capacity to implement curriculum change.

Key findings

1. **Colleges need internal structures that enable demands to be fed in and responded to quickly**
2. **Colleges need effective mechanisms for capturing and understanding learner, community and/or employer needs**
3. **Curriculum change needs to be evidence-based and responsive to the identified needs of users**
4. **College staff need support, time and encouragement to plan, lead, facilitate and play an individual part in curriculum change**
5. **Curriculum change can require new job roles, new partnerships and new ways of working**
6. **Curriculum change benefits from piloting, testing and trialling and evaluating before large-scale changes are implemented**
7. **Curriculum change needs to have a clear rationale that can be communicated to and easily understood by staff**

1. Internal structures: self-assessment questions

- If a local employer, community group or other agency such as Job Centre Plus (JCP) would like the college to develop a course to meet a particular need, how easy would they find it to contact the appropriate person to discuss their needs?
- How quickly would we be able to respond to any in-year demands? Could college staff meet these demands or would we need to need to contract in agency staff?
- Do our decision-making processes enable us to respond quickly to new demands?
- How flexible can we be about when and where we offer learning in order to be responsive? For example, would our current staff contracts support this sort of working?

Examples of practice

Hull College has improved the links between its commercial and curriculum teams in order to respond quickly to employer need.

Sussex Downs College is developing its in-house capacity to respond to in-year demands through use of a team of curriculum innovators.

2. Understanding user needs: self-assessment questions

- How effective, accessible and inclusive are our current methods of capturing learners' wants and needs?
- How well do we currently understand the needs of our local community? What mechanisms do we use for inviting and listening to their views?
- To what extent are we using labour market intelligence to shape our curriculum?
- How effectively are we engaging with employers? How diverse are the methods we use to contact them and listen to their needs?
- To what extent does our understanding of employer needs shape the content and delivery of the curriculum?
- How effectively do we use existing partnerships with key local stakeholders to help us understand user needs?

Examples of practice

Liverpool College undertook a **student survey** as part of their teaching and learning strategy, adapting questions from Frank Coffield's All you ever wanted to know about learning but were too cool to ask (2009).

Derby College's student questionnaire helped them design a curriculum that would lead to sustained success. Both tutors and students answered the same questions about their past experiences of learning.

Sunderland College began their investigation into employer needs with a **questionnaire** but an initial low level of response led them to more creative ways of finding out what employers wanted to see in their new Engineering curriculum

3. Evidence-based change: self-assessment questions

- When we implement curriculum change, to what extent are we acting on an evidence base?
- How effectively do we carry out our own research? How diverse are our research methods? How confident are we to assess and adopt alternative methodologies?
- How much use do we make of research undertaken by others?
- How well do we use the data that we have gathered or to which we are given access?

Examples of practice

Sunderland College used a questionnaire, a focus group, a training needs analysis exercise and took part in a business debate with CEOs/MDs of regional engineering companies to check their findings.

Liverpool College drew heavily on published research to create its **Teaching and Learning strategy**, including work by Frank Coffield, Dylan Wiliam and Jill Jameson.

York College's approach to establishing Professional Learning Communities was based on research cited by Frank Coffield, John Hattie and Dylan Wiliam and then developed by staff to meet their specific needs.

4. Developing staff capacity: self-assessment questions

- To what extent does the culture of our college encourage and reward experimentation and innovation in curriculum design and delivery?
- To what extent is CPD focused on increasing staff confidence and competence to innovate in relation to the curriculum?
- How effectively are staff supported to plan, develop and share new curriculum content or delivery approaches? Have we talked to them about the support they need and the forms of support that would be most appropriate? How much time do staff have to focus on innovation?
- To what extent is curriculum innovation developed through a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach, with learners and practitioners rather than managers taking the lead?

Examples of practice

York College's process map for building professional learning communities demonstrates the need to build staff confidence and capacity over time and through providing one another with mutual support.

Liverpool College identified that an investment in building staff capacity is the first step in enabling curriculum innovation. See key strategic aims 1 and 8 of their Teaching and Learning Strategy

Sussex Downs College's pilot activity in providing in-year courses for unemployed learners referred by JCP revealed the need to provide intensive support to the curriculum innovators leading the provision. The curriculum innovators, through working as a cross-department team, were also self-supporting.

Derby College's experiment in introducing enterprise-based projects into their Entry and Level 1 curriculum revealed varying levels of staff confidence in facilitating project-based learning and the need to build staff capacity if the new approach was to be successful.

New College, Nottingham appointed enterprise intrapreneurs - existing staff who felt able to support their colleagues to embed enterprise into the curriculum. These intrapreneurs have developed a staff training module located on Moodle.

5. Curriculum change can require new job roles, new partnerships and new ways of working: self-assessment questions

- Are we matching staff with the right skills and attitudes to key curriculum change roles?
- Is there a need for new job roles, either in addition to substantive roles or in the form of completely new jobs?
- How effectively do staff from different areas of the college work together to achieve curriculum change? How well is good practice in curriculum design and delivery shared across departments?
- Do our existing partnerships with agencies outside of the college need reviewing or re-modelling in order to support responsiveness?
- Do we involve partners, including employers, in the design and delivery the curriculum – or does their involvement stop at the consultation stage?
- Do we need to establish new partnerships in order to reach new learners, to understand our local community better or to work more closely with employers?

- Are we represented on the right groups locally? Are we sending the right people to these groups?

Examples of practice

Hull College created a new commercial/curriculum liaison role to enable better team-working between the different departments. As a result, they have a far better understanding of each other's ways of working and are better able to meet employer demand.

Sussex Downs College created a **new curriculum innovator role**, in order to enable those members of staff excited by the idea of curriculum change to be in the vanguard.

In order to prioritise enterprise within their curriculum, **New College, Nottingham** appointed an **entrepreneur in residence** and a group of **enrichment and enterprise interns**. They also invited existing staff to become '**enterprise intrapreneurs**', supporting other staff to embed enterprise into the curriculum.

6. Curriculum change benefits from piloting, testing and trialling, and evaluating before large-scale changes are implemented: self-assessment questions

- As a college, do we allow sufficient time to plan for curriculum change, experiment with different options, and reflect on and evaluate approaches – or do we sometimes implement change on a knee-jerk basis in our hurry to get things right as fast as we can?
- To what extent do we pilot curriculum change before we roll it out on a large scale?
- How effectively do we evaluate any small-scale curriculum change activity? How innovative are we in the methods that we use to evaluate change? How well do we capture learner feedback?
- How well do we identify and assess performance against measurable outcomes?
- How good are we at applying the learning from pilot activity to large-scale change?

Examples of practice

Derby College set up a pilot between two curriculum areas to test out their project-based, cross-department approach to developing a stimulating Entry and Level 1 curriculum. They videoed staff and learners in action and plan to use the video as development tool both for the staff who were involved and for others as they roll out the approach across the college.

Sussex Downs College trialled and evaluated two JCP courses, using their findings to establish a business case for continuing and expanding the work. Findings were captured through a number of ways including **a reflective diary** completed by the curriculum innovators. By recruiting those most enthusiastic staff as 'early adopters' they plan to develop and demonstrate to others an effective methodology for responding swiftly to in-year demands.

7. Curriculum change needs to have a clear rationale that can be communicated to and easily understood by staff: self-assessment questions

- How good are we at making a case for change?
- How well do we communicate the rationale for change when we are investigating or implementing curriculum change?
- How successful are we in presenting the case for change in a positive light (eg as an improvement for learners, employers and/or staff, rather than as efficiency-driven)
- How well do we bring along staff with us, rather than imposing change on them?

Examples of practice

Many of the changes at **Liverpool College** are being driven forward by Advanced Lecturers, rather than senior managers, although their work is part of a cross-college approach supported by senior managers.

Sussex Downs College has used its pilot activity to produce a business case to support the introduction of curriculum innovators across the college.

The **York College** Professional Learning Community model allows ideas to flow both ways through the college hierarchy. It has prepared the ground for staff to engage with and take a lead on addressing the challenges inherent in curriculum redesign.

The enterprise strategy at **New College, Nottingham** is being promoted by the enterprise entrepreneurs, with a clear message that an enterprising education helps to bridge the gap between the traditional educational offer of core skills and qualifications and the world of work.

Moving forward

What actions could we take to...					
Area to address	Actions	Lead	By when?	Priority 1, 2 or 3 1 = urgently 2 = soon 3 = when time allows	Relevant learning we could draw on (eg from 157 Group curriculum change projects)
1. review and revise our internal structures to better support responsiveness					
2. improve our ability to capture and understand user need					
3. increase our use of robust evidence when implementing curriculum change					
4. enable our staff to become more innovative in relation to the curriculum					
5. ensure we have the right job roles, the right partnerships and effective ways of working together to facilitate curriculum change					
6. make better use of testing and trialling curriculum change					
7. prepare and present the case for change with greater clarity					

Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Friars House, Manor House Drive
Coventry CV1 2TE

t 024 7662 7900
e enquiries@lsis.org.uk
www.lsis.org.uk

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Registered office Friars House, Manor House Drive, Coventry CV1 2TE