Project summary

The Creative Competency Curriculum ('CCC') has been developed to encourage independent, creative and inquisitive learners who will be prepared for a changing world. It grew from a realisation that the National Curriculum had become information-driven, and that a customised curriculum was needed to provide a more broad, balanced and memorable learning experience for our students.

Initially the Humanities, the Expressive Arts and ICT were combined, and Year 7 were taught for eight hours per week with one teacher in the main. Cross-curricular projects were planned by the CCC team with the aim of providing interesting content whilst providing opportunities to develop transferable skills.

Towards the end of the first year the results were noticeable, particularly in terms of increased motivation and improved behaviour. Thus, the college has decided to extend the curriculum time to include English and Citizenship. This academic year, Year 7 now spends a total of 12 hours in the 'CCC', and the College is very enthusiastic about the projected results with English skills underpinning the course in addition to the competences.

Specific aspect of practice to be accredited?

Raising attainment through offering a KS3 curriculum which is inclusive and that provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for students. 'Learning to learn' techniques and the development of transferable skills will equip students for the KS4-5 curriculum and beyond.

Aspect of Every Child Matters addressed:

- Be healthy
- Make a positive contribution
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Achieve economic well-being

What were you hoping to achieve?

- successful learners who progress and achieve
- confident individuals who lead safe and healthy lives
responsible citizens who are aspirant and innovative, and who make a positive contribution to society.

**How did you identify the need for this practice?**

The Senior Leadership Team discussed new approaches to KS3 with the revision of the National Curriculum. It was decided that in order to meet the new curriculum aims, a holistic curriculum based on the core skills for life was needed in Year 7.

**Briefly describe the main characteristics of the school?**

Spring 2010 census:

- 714 students on roll
- 22% White British, 78% other (mainly Asian heritage/Pakistani)
- 21% of the student population are on the SEN register
- 25% of the student population eligible for free school meals

**What did you do?**

In April 2008, the Senior Leadership Team proposed a 'foundation' curriculum to Middle Leaders in response to the changes to the KS3 curriculum. The opportunity to tailor a curriculum which would suit our Y7 intake was suggested: a curriculum fit for the 21st century based on the development of skills and focusing on how students learn was proposed.

It was also highlighted that progress from KS2-KS4 was a concern, and that there was a need to focus on the crucial transition phase from primary to secondary in order to build on good practice. Therefore, SLT proposed that the faculties of Exploration (History, Geography, RE) and Expression (Art, Music, Drama) and ICT were merged to allow for the development of a thematic, competence-led curriculum which would be engaging and relevant to today's learners. Although one subject leader was concerned over the loss of curriculum time, it was overwhelmingly accepted that there was a need to develop students' independent learning and social and emotional skills in order for them to succeed at KS4.

Following this meeting, key personnel carried out research into the RSA's Opening Minds curriculum which provided a framework to work towards. Visits to establishments already delivering this type of curriculum followed, including the John Cabot Academy in Bristol, Walton-le-Dale Performing Arts College in Preston and Haslingden High School.

From this research, the CCC (Creative Competency Curriculum) was created. Planning for the new curriculum involved a series of meetings with key members of staff from each department. The member of staff responsible for leading the curriculum ensured that the competencies were the focus of the curriculum rather than subject content. Making this shift from content to skills was and still is the most challenging aspect of the curriculum, as secondary teachers, by their specialist training, have traditionally placed emphasis on the delivery of subject content.
The location of the CCC was given high importance, and it was decided to house it in its own learning area which was entirely re-decorated to create a stimulating and homely environment for our Year 7 learners. The whole year group are taught at the same time, and a very large classroom was re-carpeted to allow for lead lessons and whole-year group learning.

Music plays a very important part in the CCC, both in classrooms where carefully chosen music is used to accelerate learning and in the corridor to create a calm and welcoming environment. Singing as a year group is a feature of Friday afternoons. In the second year English was included in the CCC, and curriculum time was increased from 8 hours to 12. Some revisions to staffing were made, and in order to meet National Curriculum requirements in English every class is either taught by an English specialist or has one attached to it. This has strengthened the curriculum as our Y7 students have well below average standards in literacy and they now follow a curriculum for 12 hours per week which is underpinned by crucial literacy skills.

Our projects, which are constantly evolving, centre around three broad themes per term: Our Identity; The local Environment and Global Citizens. This year, the projects have been devised around QCA’s 'Cross-curriculum Dimensions', as the ethos of the CCC is to reflect some of the major issues and challenges that face our society, and to help our students make sense of the world.

An example of a project was ‘rebranding Pendle’, which focused on how they could re-design a disused mill in Brierfield to tackle issues such as obesity and at the same time bring all members of the community together. The students had to submit plans and present their ideas in a council meeting which was chaired by the Headteacher. This aspect of whole-year group learning is a key strength of the CCC and has helped to create a unique identity of which we are very proud.

**Which members of the establishment and/or wider community have been involved and what was their role?**

Key members of staff were identified to lead the development. Karen Kilgallon, Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for Learning and Teaching was the driving force behind the initiative. Wendy Thain, Faculty Leader for Expression, was identified to lead the CCC, and undertook research into the Opening Minds curriculum and learning pedagogies in order to develop an insightful curriculum which justified the loss of curriculum time in some subject areas.

Also involved in the development of the project was Sue Dawes, Assistant Headteacher for inclusion and Amy Tagg, learning mentor who were responsible for developing a nurture group within the CCC. The nurture group holds a maximum of 12 students, identified through the transition process, who are in need of a personalised approach. They broadly follow the same curriculum but are able to explore issues as they arise related to their individual needs.
A team of enthusiastic teachers were then selected from across the school to deliver the curriculum, and were trained on the principles of a competence-led curriculum by the CCC Leader. In the summer term of 2008 the team had regular planning meetings to develop projects and schemes of work. The college was successful in becoming a Creative Partnerships 'enquiry school' and our Creative Agent was involved in shaping one of the projects.

**How has the progress of the project been monitored and evaluated?**

As a constantly evolving curriculum, reflection, evaluation and adaptation are the key to its success. It is recognised that measuring the 'soft skills' which are at the core of the curriculum is difficult, but procedures have been put in place to assess students' individual skill development. In the absence of national guidelines, we are constantly seeking to develop and improve our competence curriculum. Students regularly complete peer and self-assessments to measure their skill development, and recently we have introduced 'metacognition' sessions at the beginning of every week which allow students to reflect on their habits and dispositions which affected their performance the previous week. Engaging students in thinking about their own personal development is a key aspect of the curriculum, which links well with the SEAL agenda. At the end of every project students complete an evaluation and set targets for improvement. A more formal system involving staff and parental voice is to be implemented this year, and the CCC Leader is currently working on an evaluation of the impact on the current Year 8 students who were the first cohort of students to go through the CCC.

**How has the practice been modified or improved during development?**

It became increasingly apparent that literacy was at the core of the competency curriculum, and that English should be included in the second year. However, it was decided that assessment would continue to follow the National Curriculum for speaking and listening, reading and writing, and a team of specialist teachers were trained to become competency curriculum teachers. With the inclusion of English, a new system of assessment for skills was developed based on the APP (Assessing pupil progress) system. Units of work this year have been enhanced by focusing on real and relevant issues as identified in the Cross-curriculum dimensions document. Building on the good practice in Year 7, Skills Leaders have been appointed in each faculty area to embed skill development (PLTS) across the curriculum.

**What has been the impact of the project on pupils’ learning, achievement or enjoyment and how has this been measured?**

It is not possible to measure the impact of the curriculum on attainment after this relatively short time, but there has been a marked improvement in engagement, motivation and behaviour. Attendance figures for Year 7 are the highest in the college, and are an improvement on last academic year. Through written, verbal and video evidence, students have clearly enjoyed the diverse nature of the projects which have been designed to have real and relevant content. As students progressed into Year 8, subject teachers have commented on their improved ability to work effectively in groups and the ease with which they discuss issues.
What are the next stages in the development process?

- To evaluate the impact of the CCC on the current Year 8, including student and staff questionnaires on the level of skill development and attitudes to learning.
- To evaluate the impact of the competency curriculum on the current Year 7 through photographic, verbal and written evidence.
- To assess the impact of English within the CCC initially through reading ages. All Year 7 students follow an accelerated reader programme and spend at least 20 minutes per day on independent reading. At the end of the year reading ages will be assessed again and the impact of extended reading will be measured.
- The CCC has become a whole-college initiative. The Headteacher has appointed a CCC Leader who is responsible for developing the competency curriculum across the whole college, including building on the good practice started in Year 7 with the development of PLTS (Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills) in KS3. All staff at KS3 are expected to plan and deliver PLTS as a routine part of their lessons. Ensuring that the CCC is delivered across the college and not just an aspect of learning in Year 7 is the challenge and an action plan has been developed for this purpose.

What aspects of this practice may be useful for other establishments to consider?

Decide whether to use the RSA competences or the PLTS framework, or combine them to make a personalised approach for your school/college. Guy Claxton's four R's (resilient, resourceful, reflective and reciprocal) learner is also a very good model. Visit as many establishments as possible and then decide on the best model for your students and staff. A core group of enthusiastic staff who are willing to teach outside of their subject area is essential, as is a leader who has the time to commit to it. Using QCA's 'Cross-curriculum dimensions' is a good starting point for deciding on project content.

Any Other Comment:

The CCC is a constantly evolving curriculum, and we are continually measuring its impact and effectiveness. We do not presume it to be perfect, but firmly believe it is the right way forward for our students as an innovative and engaging learning experience.