



Curriculum Design

Curriculum or curricula?

The curriculum is often thought of, and designed to be, the knowledge, skills and competences that students will be taught, supported to learn and/or develop during their time at university.

This **explicit curriculum** is typically captured in a programme specification document. In reality however *the* curriculum encompasses much more and is in fact better thought of as a number of overlapping but not necessarily integrated, curricula.

In addition to the explicit curriculum students encounter both an **implicit** curriculum, and a **hidden curriculum**. The former describes the informal learning that takes place as students navigate the culture and expectations of their learning environment, and the latter includes the things that students learn through their participation in a programme that are a consequence of the way things are planned and done, but that are not planned during the curriculum design process. An integrated and **inclusive curriculum** (the design of which anticipated the existence and occurrence of the *explicit, implicit* and *hidden* curricula) will benefit all students.

Read: the [Inclusive Curriculum Guidance for Transforming Programmes.](#)

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When designing the curriculum it is essential to bear in mind the **constructive alignment** of the curriculum and its programme module competencies (what will students know and should be able to do), the **learning and teaching activities** that will be involved, and the assessment tasks that will be used.

In practice this means keeping four key questions in mind

- What should the students know or be able to do by the end of the course?
- What do employers need graduates of the course to know and be able to do?
- Which teaching methods or resources will be used to enable students to achieve these outcomes/competences?
- Which assessment tasks and criteria will enable students to know that they have achieved these outcomes/competences?

Constructive Alignment

Constructive alignment, from the work of John Biggs, suggests that learners construct their own learning through relevant learning activities. All components in the teaching system should be aligned to each other:

- The curriculum and its intended outcomes,
- The teaching methods and learning activities used,
- The assessment tasks (which includes both formative and summative assessment activities) using clearly aligned criteria



As the QAA (2018) stipulates, these should all be "developed in accordance with the academic level of study, using appropriate descriptors and consistent language. They reflect course and module aims as well as other factors where appropriate, such as professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements."

Keep three key questions in mind when thinking about designing your curriculum and associated assessment:

1. What should the students know or be able to do by the end of the course?
2. Which methods and resources will I use in my teaching to encourage students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to achieve these outcomes?
3. Which assessment tasks and criteria will help me and my students know that they have met the intended competencies?

Arena, Blended, Connected

There are a number of frameworks available to help you design of your curriculum, be that in a blended, flipped or fully online format. The framework recommended by the University is called ABC. Developed at University College London, it builds on the six learning types concept from Prof Diana Laurillard's hugely respected model of how students learn, 'Conversational Framework', described in *Teaching as a Design Science* (2012).

ABC centres around a hands-on workshop which guides you through the design process (module or programme), focusing on activities and assessment. Within the session you will develop a storyboard for your module/programme, identifying the types of activity that you would like to include (for example practice elements, discussion, collaboration). Such frameworks rely on conversation amongst those who will be delivering. The use of a framework is to gather consensus on how a programme or module will be run and to achieve some form of consistency and agreed assessment strategies.

Case Study

This paper by Christine Brown Wilson and Christine Slade provides a model for [consultative programme design](#).

AdvanceHE produced a [collection of case studies](#) on the hidden curriculum in 2020

Reflection

The following table is taken from Ashwin, P. et al (2015) *Reflective Teaching in Higher Education* (with supplementary resources at: <http://reflectiveteaching.co.uk/books-and-resources/rthe2/>) . You should choose a module or programme for which you have some responsibility for curriculum design and consider the level of student involvement. Looking at your responses, consider whether there areas in which you would like to increase student input and how you might do that.



Table one: Self-assessing the extent of student engagement in your courses

	1 Not involved at all	2	3	4	5 Lots of involvement
1. Input into knowledge content of the curriculum.					
2. Input into the design of learning activities in the curriculum.					
3. Input into the design of the assessment methods.					
4. Input into the production of assessment criteria.					
5. Involvement in processes of research or enquiry as part of the module/programme.					
6. Involvement in evaluation of the module/programme for future development.					
7. Involvement in decisions about the future development of the module/programme.					

References

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