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*LiRRiC - life-role relevance in curriculum  
proposals for psd to the QCA*

WHAT 'LIRRIC' MEANS for  
CAREERS WORK

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QCA is considering 'blue-sky' thinking for the future of careers work, citizenship, and personal-social-and-health education. It is part of an on-going root-and-branch curriculum rethink for 11-19 year-olds. Everything is subject to consultation.

One of the proposals is for 'LiRRiC' – life-role relevance in curriculum. It would integrate all of these elements of personal-and-social development into a coherent whole, and it would make that whole integral to the overall curriculum. Basing the case on a contemporary account of learning needs, Bill argues we must do this now - if young men and women are to find learning a satisfying basis for sustainable action in their lives.

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There is a question which song-lyricist Marvin Gaye and sociologist Irving Goffman agree lies at the heart of the human condition. And that question is – ‘what’s going on?’. They have a point: as a species we survive by understanding what’s happening. The question also lies at the heart of curriculum.

Our National Curriculum subjects each pose their own take on the ‘who?’, ‘where?’, ‘when?’, ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ supplementaries of that base-line question. The answers are what any society must transmit to each rising generation. They assemble into a body of knowledge, skills and values. The introduction to our National Curriculum calls it education for ‘spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development’. In its purest form it is ‘academic’ learning. Assessment systems tell us how well students are taking it on board. It then becomes attainment - pursued to high standards. Key curriculum concepts here include ‘academic’, ‘transmission’, ‘assessment’ and ‘standards’.

All is necessary: after all, if our students don’t know ‘wassup?’, how can they know ‘what they’re gonna do’?

### ***looking for relevance***

It would come as a bit of a surprise to many of our youngsters to find that academic learning can be useful with the ‘gonna-do’ question. But it can - helping a person to be (say) a more satisfied customer, a more reliable parent, a more effective citizen, and an even-more welcome lover – as well as a more fulfilled career manager. Curriculum should be a starting gun, not a finishing line.

But we know that the action only takes off when students imagine credible scenarios for where and how they will use the learning in their lives. And we know that it pays off when they have time, space and support, not just to take on board required skills, but also how they will deal with the social influences and inner feelings that press on everything they do.

These take-off and pay-off realities should underpin all of psd – and all of work-related-learning and education-for-enterprise. The introduction to our National Curriculum comes closest when it speaks of preparing students for ‘...the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’. Key concepts are ‘meaning’, ‘relevance’, ‘transfer’ and ‘action’.

So, academic attainment is a necessary but not a sufficient driver for learning. There are two drivers: what can be known, and why it is worth knowing. Without those standards learning would be lacking, without this relevance it would be futile.

If both had been fully engaged, then psd would not be as frail and overloaded as it is. But we may now be looking at a chance to make relevance as centrally integral to curriculum as are standards. We need not forever cling to the edge of timetable.

### ***making curriculum life-role relevant***

Now is a good time to speak up: the current QCA root-and-branch review of 11-19 curriculum is looking for blue-sky thinking. Among the proposals is LiRRiC – life-role relevance in curriculum.

Why life-role? Because when people act on their lives they do so in role – it is where and how we use our learning in our lives. The role scenarios may be of job-seeker, or friend, or consumer, or partner, or one off the many other roles we

each take on. The idea reaches into every corner of a person's life. Life-role is a credible whole-person concept.

But LiRRiC does not clamour for more role-related space in the conventional timetable. It seeks adequate blocks not squeezed-in slots. And it organises that space so that academic standards and life-role relevance share common ground. That requires:

- > **a planned programme;**
- > **developing across the key stages;**
- > **in a series of schemes;**
- > **each in its own long-block time;**
- > **each with its own team of academic, expert and community-based helpers;**
- > **each pointing to how the learning helps in domestic, neighbourhood, working and citizen roles;**
- > **with time and space to enable students progressively to work out why, where and how they will use this learning;**
- > **each scheme based on a local appreciation of learning needs;**
- > **each pursuing a clear set of outcomes.**

Schemes like this sometimes feature in psd now. LiRRiC will develop them as the principle strategy both for enabling learning and for positioning life-role relevance in curriculum. It asks 'what's going on?' and 'what can you do about it?' in the same breath.

Suppose, for example, a school or college were to find that year-9 students need help on substance abuse. First of all, there are no surprises there for careers workers: what people do about drugs links to what can happen as a worker. But, more than that, what a person does about drugs can also impact a person's life as lover, friend, parent, consumer and volunteer.

It is the depth, breadth and dynamics of this contemporary reality which demands that LiRRiC is part of a unified curriculum - with academic and life-role relevant learning as full partners. To know 'what's going on?' students need expert sources – people who can help them find out what they need to understand. On substance abuse, understanding the science of biological effects will help, as will the mathematics of probability, and the history of prevalence, the geography of supply, the economics of demand, the media-study of how people are informed, and the literature of experience. It's hard to see how anybody can properly get to grips with the challenge on any lesser basis. And it's also hard to think of a better reason for probing all that so-called 'academic' stuff. This is where 'academia' and psd make common ground.

### ***is LiRRiC practical enough?***

There are two starting points for practicality. Resource-based practicality moves from what is available to what can happen – action is sometimes rejected as impractical because we can't afford it. But such 'practicality' risks allocating scarce resources to schemes that won't work. And that is doubly impractical.

LiRRiC practicality starts with needs: it seeks the resources to fit the task. The panel suggests how.

## ***A LiRRiC scheme***

### **planning**

- > identify learning needs - at *this* stage in *our* students' experience;
- > identify life roles – in which students will see the usefulness of the learning;
- > identify academic teachers - willing and able to help;
- > identify helpful community-based mentors - with appropriate experience;
- > bring in community-based experts - such as Connexions people;
- > negotiate common ground for the scheme – pointing to who will do what;
- > design a scheme - engaging small-group, whole-group and individual activity.

### **delivery**

- > engage students in examining clear role markers - pointing to where and how this learning is useful;
- > engage students and their helpers in a progressive sequence - helping each other to examine, question, sort, probe, explain, try-out and adapt the learning for its usefulness.

### **follow-through**

- > engage students in anticipating where else in their lives they can see that they can use this learning – other life roles;
- > engage students in recording learning outcomes and planning how they will learn more.

### **follow-up**

- > take on board students' reactions to this learning – for its relevance and its usefulness;
- > identify where this learning can usefully be improved;
- > begin work on the up-coming LiRRiC scheme.

LiRRiC is a sequence of such projects. None will fit into conventional timetable slots. On substance abuse, a group of sixty year-9 students could make good use of three two-hour blocks. Much of its usefulness would be in finding out how to find things out – learning-to-learn.

Such arrangements won't be new to anybody who has helped to set up a well-managed experience-of-work programme. And the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative was noted for such schemes: subject-linked, life-relevant, community-based, active learning. *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps* are egging us on to do even more of this now.

It all calls on a flexible practicality; and the positioning of LiRRiC gives it plenty of room for manoeuvre. Some LiRRiC schemes need more time, some less. Some need to be continuously concentrated, some episodically spread out. And the

opportunities for the use of new learning technologies will take you as far as your commitment and imagination can go.

But it is in team building that LiRRiC flexibility is most fruitful. The team for each scheme is different - each specifically brought in: for a clear purpose, calling on particular expertise, experience - and an ability to get a buzz into learning. We could call it 'new-model' team building. (Oliver Cromwell won with a smaller 'new-model army' - with its sharp appreciation of what needed to be done, and why. A C17th manifestation of 'less is more'.)

### ***is it radical enough?***

Any 'new-model' move is bold. In LiRRiC it links subject to subject. It also links life-role to life-role. This is because the social-and-emotional pressures on leisure, family and community roles are much the same as they are on work roles. And people seek well-being across the board - 'work-life balance'. None of these dynamics are weakening: at the extremes struggling with the question 'what can I do about this?' can lead a person into exclusion - or drive him into crime.

The LiRRiC response is - as-and-when needed - to restructure both the academic subject-base and the psd-work-related-enterprise timetable:

- > **linking role to role - enabling learning for work-life balance and well-being as well as for targeted performance;**
- > **linking academic learning to life-role relevance - drawing in useful expertise on what is going on and how to find out more;**
- > **linking academic subjects to each other - in a scheme-by-scheme joining together of what a wholly subject-based timetable puts asunder;**
- > **linking to community-based help - bringing in both useful expertise and credible experience;**
- > **negotiating the time and space required for learning progression, transfer of learning and learning-to-learn.**

Long-block programming is the only strategy which can do all of this. A key concept is integration; learning-for-life cannot be enabled without such links. But careers-education-and-guidance has been stronger on 'vertical' links with other career-management specialists. LiRRiC does not abandon vertical links; but it is bolder, making 'lateral' links to a wider range of academic and community resources - and for a wider range of life-roles.

### ***enough to think about?***

Much our past thinking has focussed on change in global markets, on the need for competitiveness, and on our economic significance.

But there is a neglected second-wave effect of globalisation - impacting people in their communities. An example is how global technologies are changing the way people learn about what they will do in life. They have new ways of finding options for action - whether in political, religious, consumer or working life. And there are more groups ready to inform, advise and cajole in all these spheres. More than that: allegiances form around these groups, focussing for example on social membership, ethnicity, and - increasingly - around commercial logos. It is all media-transmitted, but its messages form some of the most powerful influences on local lives. And if people are changing how they learn, we must think again about how we help.

LiRRiC therefore urges some serious professional head-work - for:

- > **deepening our understanding of our own school's or college's catchment economy and culture - and the learning needs that stem from that;**
- > **drawing on the breadth and depth of academic curriculum – relying on its high standards;**
- > **engaging resources from across the curriculum - and making life-role relevant learning integral to the whole;**
- > **using this central position to gauge the usefulness of the whole curriculum – so that we can suggest needed curriculum reform.**

Take the substance-abuse example: we start from local needs but we move to thinking about what we transmit - from the biology of bodily effects to the epistemology of why we believe anything. There are serious possibilities here for making the whole curriculum more responsive to twenty-first-century change. And we would be at the heart of it.

### ***what can you do about this?***

LiRRiC may stand or fall. If it falls, familiarity will not have been the problem: more-of-the-same is no longer an option. In changing times habitual thinking is a poor guide.

There is a long way to go. We have some policy support, but we'll need more. But policy is no more than aspirational: it needs LiRRiC's operational strategy for achieving its priorities – right now for those in *Youth Matters* and *Next Steps*. Both publications acknowledge that the stage-by-stage development of local and specific tactical measures will take time. And LiRRiC poses it's own batch of questions for the needed research and evaluation. There is no quick fix here.

Which is where our professionalism comes in. There is nothing in LiRRiC that will undermine that professionalism. There is, though, much that might cause us to rethink what we mean by the term: LiRRiC will draw on the whole of our current apparatus, but it will also expand its scope and extend its usefulness.

And so it is crucial that careers workers have their say – not to defend what we have been doing but to help shape what more can be done. LiRRiC needs help because...

- ... **it hinges on neighbourhood-based programme-development – locally designing an engaging and productive journey-through-learning;**
- ... **it relies on an understanding of how students are, and are not, able to use and adapt what they learn;**
- ... **it requires a special kind of programme-management - building teams from a varied range of organisational, community, and voluntary help.**

The experience of careers-work people will have taught them a great deal about all of this. We need to hear what they know on all three matters.

And, of course, if policy were to prove less supportive than we might like it to be, that would not rule out wholly-locally driven action. You could develop something more practical, really bold and much smarter.

So, whatever happens to LiRRiC, we've a lot to say to the QCA.



## ***LiRRiC - what is this, who is it for, what does it say?***

This summarises a consultative paper about curriculum prepared by Bill Law for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. It argues for how we can better help young men and women to manage their everyday lives.

We all have an interest in this - curriculum is community property. It is, then, for all stakeholders to consider: in the community (such as families and business people), in local and central government (including policy-makers and their advisers), and in the education system (for example teachers and their managers).

It sets out 'blue-sky' thinking. The only starting points are:

1. a commitment to enabling young people effectively to meet challenges and sustainably to find joy in twenty-first-century living;
2. an assumption that an essential requirement is the maintenance of high standards in 'academic' learning;
3. a belief that a necessary requirement is effective programmes of useful learning for personal and social development.

In all other respects the paper starts from scratch; existing arrangements for careers work, citizenship personal and social and health education and other aspects of psd are, for the moment, set on one side.

Working on that blank sheet of paper, the main points developed are...

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### **the main points**

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### **the key concepts**

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- a.** *Education for personal and social development is most usefully established as integral to the whole curriculum – not as a series of separate supplements to an 'academic' main event. Indeed, learning for personal and social development itself draws upon knowledge gained from 'academic' subjects.*

#### **whole curriculum**

*promoting attainment and preparing for life*

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- b.** *Learning for personal and social development therefore needs to be structured in a way which does not undermine those standards but makes common ground with them.*

#### **common ground**

*academic achievement for personal fulfilment*

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**c.** *The timetabling strategy best suited to this purpose restructures conventional curriculum boundaries. It does this, as and when required, by setting aside space and time for students to examine what they learn in the light of how they can use that learning in their lives.*

### **integration**

*joined-up, multidisciplinary and cost effective*

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**d.** *The strategy brings together the two inter-dependent aspects of curriculum: standards, which ensure that what is learned is sound; and relevance which shows that what is learned is worth knowing. Without standards curriculum is shaky, without relevance it is futile.*

### **relevance**

*for well-being, decision making and usefulness in life*

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**e.** *The strategy requires an inclusive, coherent and recognisable framework for identifying what students need to learn for use in their lives. That organising concept is life role.*

### **life role**

*'being there' - on a task, in a setting, with other people*

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**f.** *The idea of role is useful because all life's decisions and transitions are accomplished in role – in a family, as a neighbour, with friends, as an employee or entrepreneur, using income, and as voter and activist. Life-roles provide a whole-person, socially located and recognisable framework for identifying the usefulness of learning.*

### **whole person**

*experiencing feelings, living in relationships, making judgements*

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**g.** *This is learning for action. It is attitudes, knowledge and abilities which enable people to know what to do in their lives. The whole of this 'to-do' quality of learning is called skills.*

### **skills**

*attitudes, knowledge and abilities for action*

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**h.** *Programme development for life-role-related learning calls for distinctively active teaching-and-learning methods: attending to progression, transferability and social-and-emotional context. Wholly 'academic' approaches do not do this.*

### **learning for action**

*active learning for action in life*

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**i.** *In contemporary world young men and women have many sources of information and impressions, are in touch with increasingly persuasive ways of translating that knowledge into action, and can – therefore - readily see themselves as independent of school-based and professional help.*

### **young people**

*responding to their needs,  
voice and choice*

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**j.** *The programme therefore needs to be managed in terms which take account, not just of academic and professional expertise, but also of community-based experience – the experience of students and of people that influence them.*

### **community links**

*experts, and others helping  
other people's children*

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**k.** *Programme management decisions are therefore best made locally, and in relation to the economic and cultural conditions which prevail in the school's catchment.*

### **local**

*starting from community,  
neighbourhood and village*

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**l.** *Schemes like these are often developed by intuitive and insightful people - with a feel for this special kind of management. Their work rates a QCA mandate and framework - setting out the possibilities for others. The term used here to refer to that programme is 'Life-role Relevance in Curriculum – LiRRiC'.*

### **programme management**

*diagnosing needs, designing  
schemes, building teams*

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**m.** *The programme adds value to curriculum - notably usefulness, credibility and coherence in the eyes of students. Its unified links with 'academic' learning means that those gains can be made curriculum-wide. It is a force for further adaptive reform - pointing to what students now most need to learn.*

### **enhancement and reform**

*changing needs changing  
curriculum*

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### *more help*

LiRRiC is based on a sequence of ideas set out in the Career-learning Café at:

[www.hihohiho.com/...](http://www.hihohiho.com/...)

<b>DOTS</b>	analysis of careers work coverage	.../memory/cafdots.pdf
<b>CPI</b>	extended to processes & influences	.../movingon/CPITxt&Map/cafcpiprjcttxt.html
<b>experience</b>	calling on both expertise & experience	.../underpinning/caffutures.pdf
<b>narrative</b>	experience can only be told as stories	.../underpinning/cafbiog.pdf

and later in 2006:

<b>group cultures</b>	thinking beyond conventional boundaries	.../underpinning/cafculture.pdf
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