

The aims of the new Lower Secondary curriculum

By NCDC

One of the biggest problems of Uganda at present is youth unemployment. This affects those who leave school after Lower Secondary school as well as those who go on to further education and those who graduate from universities. Many of each group are unemployed. This suggests that our present education system is not giving students the right background for employment.

In the previous article we explained that one reason for this is that our present system puts its main emphasis on students gaining large amounts of knowledge to pass exams in many different subjects. Employers, however, complain that many of those they employ may have plenty of knowledge but they do not have the skills suitable for doing jobs well. They cannot write, read or talk well; cannot be left to do a job on their own because they cannot think for themselves and use their own initiative; cannot plan and carry out tasks properly; and cannot work with others in a group to solve problems. At the same time, many Universities complain that even those who have 'passed' the present exams, lack skills in writing and cannot think well and solve problems for themselves. Some University faculties are even setting their own entrance exams.

To solve these problems, as explained in the previous article, a new Lower Secondary curriculum has been devised emphasizing skills, both thinking skills and practical skills, as well as knowledge. In addition to the inclusion of skills in each Learning Area, the curriculum is based on a set of *Generic Skills*. These are practical and thinking skills which are important in all learning and will be important for the future lives of all learners. They include the skills needed in most forms of employment.

Each syllabus has been written to include these skills in their methods of learning.

The *Generic Skills* are:

Critical Thinking and Problem-solving; including the ability to plan and carry out investigations; sort and analyze information; identify and solve problems; predict outcomes and evaluate different solutions

Independent and Co-operative Learning; including the ability to work independently and with others in groups and to manage goals and time

Creativity and innovation; including the ability to use imagination to develop new ideas and solutions and try innovations

Communication; including the ability to listen, talk, read and write effectively and use a range of media

Calculation; including the ability to use numbers and measurements accurately; interpret mathematical data; use mathematics to justify and support decisions

ICT (Information and Communication Technology); including the use of all forms of technology, computers and mobile phones, to research and communicate.

These Generic Skills will not be taught as separate subjects, but will be used within each of the Learning Areas. The inclusion of ICT indicates another reason for changing from a knowledge-based to a skills-based curriculum. When the present curriculum was devised all knowledge had to be gained from listening to the teacher, reading text books or the library. Now, all knowledge can be accessed through the internet using computers or mobile or smart phones. With the spread of this technology it is more important for learners to acquire the skills of finding knowledge through ICT than to accumulate a large amount of knowledge.

The present curriculum is divided into a large number of 'subjects' taught separately. Two other important aspects of education which are often lacking, therefore, are values, that is a sense of what is right and wrong, good or bad, and a general concept of what type of people the education system should be producing. The new curriculum is, therefore, based on a list of *Core Values* which should underlie all our teaching and learning. It is also based on *Key Learning Outcomes*, based on the qualities we want young people to develop through their education. It tries to answer the question: what type of citizens do we want our education to produce?

The present subject-based curriculum was devised many years ago when only a small minority of people went to secondary school. Most of those went on to further studies or paid employment in towns, so the curriculum was largely seen as a preparation for this. Now we are aiming at all students going to Lower Secondary schools, so we need to re-think the curriculum and ask what kind of knowledge, skills, values and personal qualities we want the majority of students to acquire. These must be the qualities needed for both paid and self-employment and for a society based on entrepreneurship and wealth creation. At the same time we must retain sufficient emphasis on knowledge and understanding to provide a back ground to those who do go on to further studies.

All students, whatever their future career, need a general understanding of the world they live in: the natural environment and the scientific ideas which govern this; the society they live in and the values which underlie it; the history, traditions and culture of this society; the technology important in that society, including ICT (computers and mobile phones etc.); how to develop that society through entrepreneurship; spiritual values important in their personal lives; and an understanding of physical well-being and social relationships within their lives. In addition, they need basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate, as well as the ability to find out things for themselves, think for themselves and be creative.

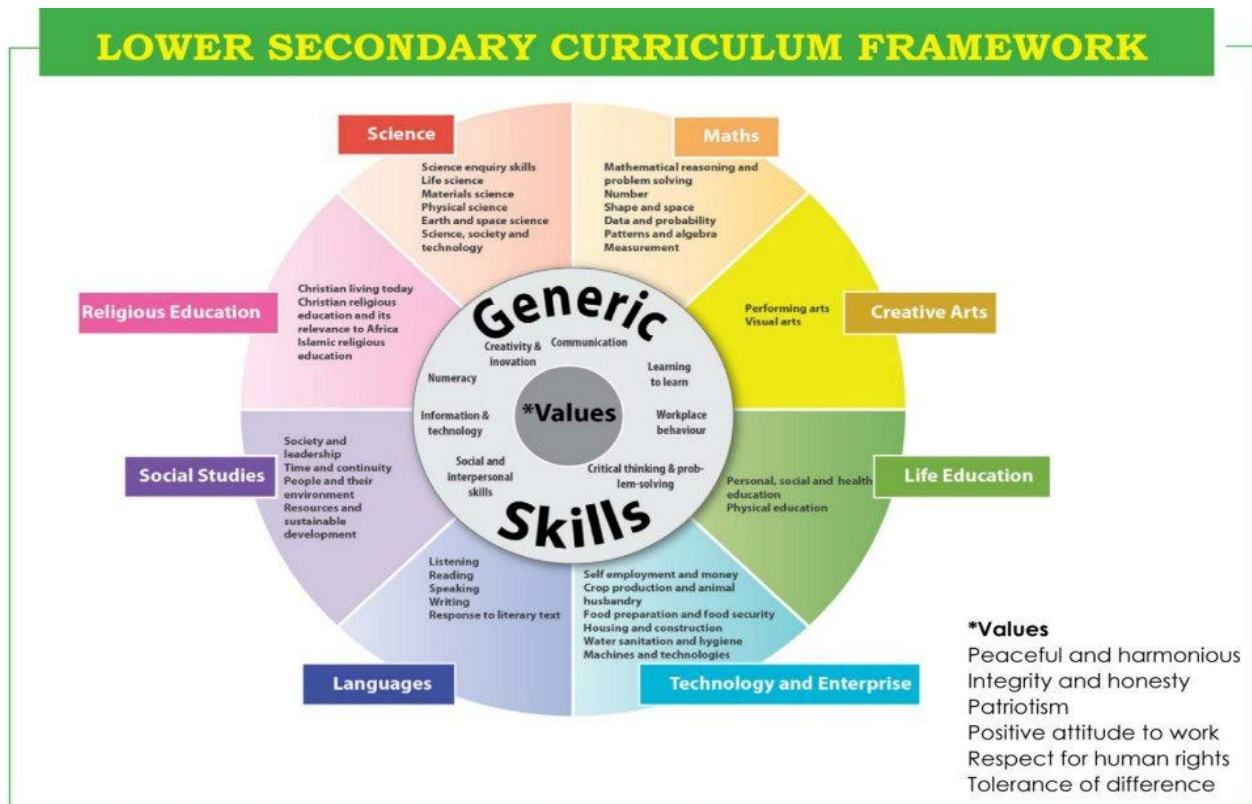
It is considered that, at this level, integration between forms of knowledge, skills and values is more important than separation and isolation into specialized 'subjects'. This means integration within subjects; integration between subjects by stressing the links between subjects rather than the differences between them; and integration of the curriculum into a wider whole, based on Core Values, Key Learning Outcomes, and Generic Skills which link all areas of study.

To achieve these objectives, the new curriculum is divided into 8 'Learning Areas', which link together and integrate all the present 'subjects', and link with all aspects of the underlying philosophy. All the essential content of the old curriculum subjects has been retained, but the emphasis is on the links between them and the relationships between concepts and

understanding across all Learning Areas. Learners should understand how their learning contributes to their own lives, the community and environment they live in, and the development of Uganda as a whole. The aim is a holistic curriculum rather than one divided into separate sections.

It should be mentioned that this structure was not adopted by Uganda in isolation, but follows a pattern adopted in many other parts of the world at this level. It also forms the basis for specialization along the lines of the present or new 'subjects' after the end of Lower Secondary school in S4.

The structure of the curriculum, therefore, is shown in this diagram.



At the centre are the *Core Values* which we are aiming to instill. Included with these are *Key Learning Outcomes* showing the qualities which we want our students to develop. Surrounding these are the *Generic Skills* which we want everyone to acquire. These will be developed through the eight *Learning Areas* which form the basis of the curriculum. Finally within these Learning Areas there are five *Cross-cutting issues*. These are important issues in Ugandan society which are not linked to one Learning Area but which cut across all areas.

We believe that this forms a curriculum which is much more suited to Ugandans in the twenty first century than the present division into up to 20 'subjects'. In the next article we will look in more detail at each of these aspects of the new curriculum

