

# Developing a curriculum fit for global citizens

By Eddie Playfair, Principal of Newham Sixth Form College (NewVIc)

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Post-16 education in this country is more than ever driven by economic and labour-market objectives. While education for work is clearly vital, we should also be educating for citizenship in its widest sense and this should be reflected in our values and curriculum.

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NewVIc is developing a Global Citizens' College to promote our students' understanding of the global challenges we face and the skills needed to address them. This will mean taking seriously the development of young people's skills for democratic participation, dialogue, debate, advocacy, representation, leadership and conflict resolution.

This broader conception of the curriculum is exemplified by the NewVIc Bacc. It is not a new course but an overarching curriculum framework for all students at level 2 and above which recognises wider achievements, offers greater breadth and challenge and values research and study skills. It is part of the wider pilot of a Sixth Form Bacc in a number of other colleges which we believe will be welcomed by universities and employers. Progression agreements are in place with local universities and discussions with other university admissions tutors have been positive.

The NewVIc Bacc provides a structure and organising principles for all students' programmes by valuing the following elements:

- Main learning (eg A levels, BTECs, Diploma principal learning, GCSEs)
- Broadening studies (eg contrasting subjects, critical thinking, citizenship, world development, theory of knowledge)
- Functional, personal, learning and thinking skills (integrated across student programmes as much as possible)
- Research Project at higher or extended level

- Personal challenge, covering community/service learning, leadership activities, careers and progression activities.

Built around recognised qualifications, the framework offers scope for 'spiky' achievement with some elements at a lower level. It promotes breadth and opportunities for making connections between the different elements. The Bacc will have a grading system and offer a certificate for partial achievement and a diploma for full achievement.

**"England should develop a unified and inclusive qualifications framework that embraces different forms of learning and promotes more effective choice and greater breadth of study."**

**Education for All: the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training (2009)**

## Youth-led regeneration

Young people should not be passive recipients of education. They can make a real difference in their community while developing their skills and confidence and promoting social cohesion. Over 400 of our students volunteer already and we want to increase this significantly. For example, we could spearhead a massive family literacy drive by pairing up parents, children, college and school student volunteers to share the experience of reading for pleasure; we know this can lead to real improvements in educational achievement, the economy and public health.

We want to move from an ethos of 'volunteering' to one of 'service learning'. Service learning is a

term used widely in US colleges and describes students' learning through active participation in organized service experiences which actually meet community needs<sup>1</sup>. We want to build on this notion by creating partnerships between young people, community organisations and employers to address identified local issues. In future, we might expect all our students to contribute at least 50 hours of service learning per year. Some of the more experienced volunteers could graduate to community organising, taking a lead in local community initiatives, and developing political and leadership skills which go beyond those developed in college.

### **The college as an active research community**

We want our staff and students to see themselves as lifelong researchers as well as learners. In future, a key element of every student's programme should be a major research project selected by them and which must have some wider social benefit. These projects could be collaborative and involve internships or placements, in some cases abroad. Topics would arise from students' personal interests or may be stimulated by one of the speakers or debates held on campus.

The process of developing valid projects and the projects themselves could be the opportunity for discussion and debate on campus and we would hope that students would take great pride in producing some outstanding and valuable original work before they leave college. The projects would be regarded by everyone as a vital part of the college's contribution to the community, its 'public value'. The best could be published or showcased on a website. Developing a project whose value is widely acknowledged could become an important part of graduation from college as well as gaining respect from universities and employers.

**"If cities are to flourish, there has to be a paradigm shift in the way they are managed, to draw fully on the talents and creativity of their own residents, businesses, city authorities and the citizens themselves."** Charles Landry

**NewVIc is one of the largest sixth form colleges in England with over 2,500 full-time students in the third most disadvantaged borough in London. Our mission is 'to create a successful learning community' and we believe that we will only realise the full potential of education to transform lives and shape the future of our area by working with others. This commitment to partnership was acknowledged in our recent OfSTED inspection report which praised NewVIc's 'outstanding and highly productive partnerships'.**

NewVIc hopes to offer other educational and cultural providers the chance to work in partnership based on shared values, shared services, shared cost and shared risk so that we can continue investing in innovative provision in response to need.

### **The innovation imperative**

We are facing a period of recession and almost inevitable pressure on public sector funding. In response, we could choose to retrench and narrow our remit or we could find ways to invest in the new forms of provision we need to support the development of a healthier economy and society. Taking a long-term view of things, there really isn't much choice!

**"Radical innovation is needed in public services to respond effectively to the long-term economic and social challenges... We need a new way of innovating in public services – a rigorous experimentation, focused on major challenges and which encourages and embraces local solutions."**

*The Innovation Imperative, NESTA (2009)*

If you are interested in working with NewVIc on the Global Citizens' College, the NewVIc Bacc or any of the proposals set out in this article, contact Eddie Playfair at [eplayfair@newvic.ac.uk](mailto:eplayfair@newvic.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup> It is, to some extent, mirrored in the requirement for young people in England to participate in the community as part of their citizenship learning. The organisation Community Service Volunteers has been promoting a similar model of service learning for many years.