

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

As with most things in education, there is no agreed definition of 'curriculum', although it is generally agreed that 'curriculum' is not the same as 'syllabus'. A syllabus is a statement of topics to be studied in the course. A 'curriculum' equally is not just a statement of intended outcomes, products, or competencies. A competent doctor, however, is one who recognises and works within the limits of their professional competence¹.

Curriculum is much more than either of these. Theorists concern themselves with different types of curriculum²:

The curriculum on paper	i.e. the statement of purpose, aims, content, experiences, materials etc
The curriculum in action	i.e. the way in which the curriculum in paper is put into practice
The curriculum learners experience	i.e. what learners do, how they study, what they believe they should be doing etc
The hidden curriculum ³	i.e. the behaviours, knowledge and performances that the learner infers to be important.

Others⁴ think of the 'planned curriculum' and the 'received curriculum', the 'formal curriculum' and the 'informal curriculum'.

Although all these types will never wholly align, curriculum developers try to write their curricula so that the curriculum on paper, the planned curriculum, is the dominant and determining force, while recognising that, especially at postgraduate level in a profession where learning is based in professional practice, individual trainees will also construct their own version of the curriculum based on their individual needs and opportunities. It is wholly appropriate that they should do so.

Amid this plethora of views, every piece of work in this field must begin with its own stated definition. So for the PMETB, the curriculum is:

¹ GMC Good Medical Practice

² Coles, C.R. and Gale Grant, Janet [1985] Curriculum evaluation in medical and health-care education. *Medical Education*, 19,5,405-422.

³ Snyder, B.R. [1971] *The Hidden Curriculum*. Knopf, New York.

⁴ Kelly, A.V. [1999] *The Curriculum. Theory and Practice*. Sage, London.

⁴ As currently set out in *Good Medical Practice*.

A statement of the intended aims and objectives, content, experiences, outcomes and processes of an educational programme including:

- a description of the training structure [entry requirements, length and organisation of the programme including its flexibilities, and assessment system],
- a description of expected methods of learning, teaching, feedback and supervision

The curriculum should cover both generic professional⁴ and specialty specific areas.