**D1: Curriculum Rationale**

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<th>Assessment criterion</th>
<th>Explain the rationale for your proposed curriculum, how it reflects the needs of your anticipated pupil intake and your plans for their progression and transition.</th>
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<td><strong>Aim of the section</strong></td>
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For each sub-section of section D, the DfE provide guidance on what should be included. You should use these like criteria and aim to meet all of those which are relevant to your school. The guidance for section D1 is as follows:

- Set out the rationale for your chosen curriculum and demonstrate how it meets the needs of your expected intake, whilst having an ambitious approach to meeting those needs;
- Explain how the curriculum and its delivery will improve pupil outcomes on a range of measures and, for secondary students, the range of qualifications which might be offered; and
- Set out clear plans for transition between phases of education and (if relevant) employment.

Following the structure of this guidance will give this section clarity, but you should use a different structure if you think it would be more appropriate for your school.

**Curriculum Principles**

You may wish to consider beginning this section with a statement of the principles behind your curriculum. These should be an expansion of the principles you outlined in your vision. They should be strongly linked to:

- Your rationale: what are you providing which will be unique in your area?
- Your proposed pupil demographic: how will your curriculum meet the educational needs of your pupils?

Writing a list of your curriculum principles, with some explanation of how you arrived at those principles and how they link to the key themes highlighted in your vision, is one great way to link section D1 with section C. This will strengthen your application. Another way to do so is to consider the questions asked above and write a few paragraphs at the beginning of section D1 which act as an introduction to the rest of the section.

However you choose to present your curriculum principles, you should make sure that you know what they are before you begin to write this section. They should be as unique to your school as
possible; this is a chance for you to dig deeper into the information you gave in your vision. When putting together your principles, you should consider the following issues:

**The breadth of your curriculum:** what does a broad curriculum mean to you? How does it change between key stages? Will all pupils study the same curriculum in any key stage and if not is there a core curriculum to which everyone is entitled? How will this fit in with potential qualifications and future pathways?

**The balance in your curriculum:** what does a balanced curriculum mean to you? Will your curriculum be basically the same for every pupil who is at the same stage of learning? How will the balance of subjects offered change as a pupil progresses through the school?

**The delivery of your curriculum:** what is the pedagogy – the philosophy and style of teaching – which will underpin how your teachers deliver the curriculum in your school? How does this link to your ethos?

**Type of curriculum**

Although Free Schools do not need to follow the National Curriculum, some choose to do so. Others choose to base their curriculum on the National Curriculum and tailor it according to the specific needs of their pupils. If you are intending to use the National Curriculum in some form in your school, it is not enough to simply state that you will do so. You must justify this decision: why is this the best curriculum for your pupils? In doing so, you should draw links with your curriculum principles.

If you will not be using the National Curriculum, you must explain why the curriculum you have chosen or designed will be more appropriate to the needs of your pupils. You have the freedom to use any curriculum you think will achieve the outcomes you want, but your choice should be rigorously justified.

If you are an existing provider aiming to convert your school into a Free School, exactly the same guidance applies. Instead of just describing the curriculum you currently offer, you should explain and justify it, with reference to the outcomes that pupils at your school have achieved in the past. If there is anything you are going to change about your curriculum, or anything that you would like to add to it, you should explain these new features in detail.

**Improving outcomes**

Your curriculum aims are the link between the curriculum - which you are describing in this section - and the outcomes that you will describe in more detail in D4. By explaining them, you must make it clear that you are addressing the DfE guidance which states: “explain how the curriculum and its delivery will improve pupil outcomes on a range of measures.” However you would prefer to present them, you should ensure that the team working on section D have come to firm conclusions on the following:

**Qualifications:** will all of your pupils achieve a certain core set of qualifications? Will the qualifications offered to each pupil be tailored to their individual needs and interests, and if so,
how? In which subjects do you think it is crucial to offer qualifications, and which will be unassessed?

**Other Outcomes:** what do you want outcomes to be for those aspects of your curriculum where there are no external assessments? Do you want all pupils to participate in your enrichment activities, and if so, to what extent? What social and emotional outcomes do you want for pupils?

**Pathways:** where do you want pupils to progress when they leave your school? How will your curriculum enable pupils who are able enough to access further and higher education to do so? How will you give them the skills to access the job market?

It is worth considering writing about the aims of your curriculum before you go into the detail of your curriculum model because this will give an assessor a good idea of why you are doing what you are doing. **However you choose to express your curriculum aims, you must ensure that you link them back to your section C** – how will these aims help you to achieve the outcomes you laid out in that section, and feed into your overarching vision for your school?

**Qualifications**

You must provide details of the exams your pupils will sit, and/or the qualifications towards which they will work. Depending on your school, you will need to provide more or less detail on these.

**If you are intending to set up a primary school,** you should state whether or not you intend to assess key stage 2 SATs. Free Schools are expected to do so, so if you do not think it is appropriate for your pupils you will need to make a very strong case.

**If you are intending to set up a secondary or 16-19 school,** there is considerably more choice and thus you need to give more information. You should list all of the qualifications which will be offered at your school, and distinguish which of them will be compulsory, which will be optional, which may be changed in response to the interests of pupils, and any other information which you think is relevant. If it is important to you to use a particular exam board, then you should state this and explain why.

As above, if you are aiming to convert an existing school, you should go further than simply describing the qualifications you already offer. You should justify why you think that they are the best and most appropriate for your school and your pupils.

You should also explain when you will offer different qualifications. This should include an explanation of what would happen if a pupil might be ready to sit an exam earlier than would be typical within your school, and an explanation of what would happen if a pupil needed more time than usual to prepare for an exam or other piece of assessed work.

The difference between what is expected here and what is expected in section D5 is that this section should be focused on your offer to pupils, whereas section D5 should be focused on your expectations of pupils. For example, you may think that it is key to offer the English Baccalaureate subjects, but you may focus on 100% of pupils taking these subjects, or on 70% of those who do take it attaining all of them at grade C or above, or both. The first half – your belief in your curriculum
offer – belongs in section D1, whereas the latter – your targets for your pupils – belongs in section D5.

**Summary**

This section gives you an opportunity to make really strong links between your rationale, your proposed pupil demographic and your educational offering. It is crucial that your explanations and justifications in this section are strong. It is worth continuing to come back to this section all the while you are developing your educational plans to ensure that you keep it up to date. Your rationale in this section should provide a strong basis for everything which follows it in section D.

**Other information**

If you want to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that does not follow the National Curriculum you may be interested in reading the Ofsted publication “Completing the record of inspection evidence and judgements”: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/completing-record-of-inspection-evidence-and-judgements-independent-schools](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/completing-record-of-inspection-evidence-and-judgements-independent-schools)