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Implications of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scottish schools on admissions for universities in England, Wales & Northern Ireland

**Universities
Scotland**



Summary

This paper sets out the implications of CfE for university admissions, and is intended to serve as a helpful brief for universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Universities Scotland has produced it¹ in response to suggestions from our 19 higher education institutions. Around 4,800 students of Scottish-domicile applied to at least one higher education institution in England, Wales or Northern Ireland through UCAS in 2014² therefore the pedagogic and qualification changes introduced by CfE will have an impact on higher education institutions beyond Scotland.

New qualifications, which support the aims and principles of CfE, began being introduced for Scottish students from 2013-14. By 2015-16, all of the new qualifications will have been introduced and any dual running with existing qualifications will have ended. As a result, the pattern of qualifications that applicants present with will change because there is more flexibility around the curriculum and the range of qualifications that a learner may take. There will be more diversity between schools in terms of how the curriculum is organised to suit local circumstances and need, with a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of individual learners. It therefore has implications for university admissions, and universities across the UK will have an interest in the details set out below. However, although new Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications are being introduced, these will be at the same standard as the present Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. Scottish universities have already been responding to these changes (see below for more information).

Universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland may wish to revisit their admissions requirements for Scottish applicants to check that these remain appropriate in the light of the changes as a result of CfE. This would ideally be done in time for 2016 entry recruitment, which will be the first year of entry for pupils exiting CfE at the end of S6 (although those pupils exiting at the end of S5 could be seeking entry in 2015).

The paper sets out:

- background to CfE;
- key changes relevant to university admissions;
- Advanced Highers / Scottish Baccalaureates;
- suggested actions for admission policies; and
- contacts.

Annex A sets out sources of further information.

Background to CfE

CfE is the 3-18 curriculum in Scotland for all state schools. Many of its approaches and qualifications are also being adopted by independent schools in Scotland. A broad general education from pre-school up to the end of S3 (third year of secondary school), is followed by the Senior Phase for the final three years of school (S4-S6). There is an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary learning, on skills development, and on personal achievement, but the emphasis on knowledge in subjects remains central. CfE is intended to foster four capacities in all pupils: to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. Schools and local authorities have considerable scope to decide how to implement CfE to meet the needs of their own learners.

A key innovation is the approach to the Senior Phase. Schools and their partners are able to offer greater personalisation and choice in a range of ways, for example by:

- designing the Senior Phase as a three year coherent programme of learning rather than planning each year separately;
- delivering qualifications over a variable timeframe in response to young people's needs and prior achievements; and
- developing pathways for able learners which by-pass qualifications at lower levels to allow more time to be spent on more challenging learning at higher levels.

The key point is that the choice for each learner may be different, within and across schools.

¹ We are grateful for comments from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, UCAS and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA).

² *Deadline Applicant Statistics: June*, UCAS (2014)

Higher Education Institutions in Scotland have given much attention to the implications of CfE in terms of admissions, and also learning and teaching. All 19 institutions have now published a statement on CfE and admissions and Universities Scotland has produced an overarching statement (links to all 19 statements and Universities Scotland's statement are in Annex A).

Key changes relevant to university admissions

This section has more information on the key changes relevant to university admissions, which are:

1. New and revised qualifications;
2. Potential changes in what applicants present with:
 - More flexibility and personalisation in how and when qualifications are taken
 - More diversity in the curriculum
3. Implementation of CfE may vary by schools and/or by local authority.

CfE also brings major changes to pedagogical practice in schools from 3-18. For more information about pedagogy please see the links in Annex A in section '*Education Scotland information*'.

1. New and revised qualifications

The table below sets out the new qualifications and specifies which qualifications they are replacing. There was no dual running of the National 4 and 5 qualifications with Standard Grades, but it will be possible to sit either the existing or new Higher in 2015. There will be no dual running of the existing and new Advanced Higher in 2016. The current Intermediate 1 and 2 qualifications will be phased out over a two year period, with the last exams being taken in 2015.

New Qualification	Previous Qualification(s)	Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework level	Equivalent Qualifications and Credit Framework and National Qualifications Framework England/ Northern Ireland level	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales level	Year of first examination in new qualifications (phased out qualifications & date ended)
National 4	Standard Grade (General) Intermediate 1	Level 4	Level 1	Level 1	2014 (Standard Grade, 2013; Intermediate 1, 2015)
National 5	Standard Grade (Credit) Intermediate 2	Level 5	Level 1	Level 1	2014 (Standard Grade, 2013; Intermediate 1, 2015)
Higher	Higher (revised content and assessment, but same standard of qualification)	Level 6	Level 3	Level 3	2015 (dual running of both versions of Higher in 2015 only)
Advanced Higher	Advanced Higher (revised content and assessment, but same standard of qualification)	Level 7	Level 4 (broadly)	Level 4 (broadly)	2016

You can access more information on the new qualifications via the links in the section entitled '*Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) information*' of Annex A.

2. Potential changes in what applicants present with:

More flexibility and personalisation in how, where and when qualifications are taken

Highers:

Pupils could study towards Highers at any point in the senior phase. Examples of pathways include the following:

- Pupils could study towards Highers in S4 and S5, sitting the exams in S5
- Pupils could study towards Highers in S4 and S5, sitting some exams in S4 and some exams in S5
- Pupils could study towards Highers in S5, sitting the exams in S5
- Pupils may take Highers or further Highers and/or Advanced Highers in S6.
- As such, pupils may have cumulative Highers, taking exams in S5 and S6 or S4, S5 and S6.

National 4 and 5 qualifications:

- Some high achieving learners may choose not to take all or some National 4 and 5 qualifications (i.e. you may receive applicants with no equivalents of GCSE level qualifications), although the learning and teaching of the National 4 and 5 syllabus would still be covered by schools.
- Pupils may take fewer National 4 and 5 qualifications than might have been the case with Standard Grades, e.g. perhaps six National 5 qualifications rather than seven or eight Standard Grades, but this is entirely a matter for individual schools and local authorities to decide.

Partnerships for delivery of curriculum:

More and more schools are working in partnership with other schools, colleges, employers and universities, developing campus approaches, distance/ online learning options and other partnership arrangements. This means they can offer young people a greater range of opportunities and choice in what they study and also encourages the development of independent learning skills in young people. Some examples involving universities can be found in Universities Scotland's *Access All Areas* publication (p35-42)³.

More diversity in the curriculum

Activities historically seen as part of the co-curriculum may be a timetabled part of the senior phase, e.g. volunteering, work experience, leadership activities, school council roles, Duke of Edinburgh, John Muir, Youth Achievement awards etc. This is likely to be seen in personal statements.

3. Implementation of CfE may vary by schools and/or local authorities

- The Scottish Government and its national agencies have not been prescriptive about how schools and local authorities need to implement CfE (school education is the statutory responsibility of local authorities)
- As outlined earlier, there is now much greater flexibility in how schools can design their Senior Phase Curriculum, with a range of different approaches being adopted across the country, aimed at meeting the different needs of learners in different areas. There are also examples of different approaches being offered within schools. For some examples of the range of pathways that young people could take through their Senior Phase as well as an insight into the rationale behind various approaches, see the links to the Education Scotland website given at the end of this paper.
- References from schools may comment on how the school has implemented CfE.
- Although, CfE aims to allow more personalisation for learners, in some instances, pupils' pathways may be shaped by the models for the Senior Phase that are used and may not be entirely down to personal choice.

Annex A provides links with more information on the different models of CfE implementation in the section entitled 'Education Scotland information'.

Advanced Highers/Scottish Baccalaureates

- There is no universal provision of Advanced Highers / Scottish Baccalaureates.^{4,5}
- Local timetabling decisions and size of school may create variations in the pattern of provision; this may affect the number of Advanced Highers offered/taken at a centre.
- Some pupils may be taught as part of a mixed Higher/Advanced Higher class.
- Some Scottish universities are contributing to provision in the Senior Phase in order to widen choice and support progression either through opening up year one courses, offering bespoke courses or facilitating city-wide provision of Advanced Highers. Examples can be found in Universities Scotland's *Access All Areas* publication (p35-42)⁶.

Suggested actions for admission policies

Review current admissions requirements for Scottish applicants to ensure that these are still appropriate in the context of CfE. Institutions may wish to take into account the following factors (see above for more detail):

- Applicants may have chosen not to take National 4 or 5 qualifications (or this may be a result of school policy).
- Applicants may have taken fewer National 4 or 5 qualifications.
- Applicants may have studied for Highers over more than one year before taking the exam.
- Applicants may have taken Higher exams over more than one year i.e. in more than one exam diet.
- Advanced Highers / Scottish Baccalaureates are not necessarily available in all schools in all subjects.
- Applicants may have a more diverse range of experience as part of their timetabled school activities e.g. with local colleges, studying for university credit, work experience etc.
- There is no standardised model for CfE and applicants will have followed different pathways.
- Although Highers and Advanced Highers are being replaced, the level and standard will remain the same. Note that some new subjects are being introduced and some subjects will no longer exist.
- Note that Advanced Highers/ Scottish Baccalaureates are not universally available and, in particular, that taking three Advanced Highers is the exception rather than the rule. (Indeed, in 2013, only 17% of candidates who took Advanced Highers took three or more. In that same year, 53% only took one Advanced Higher. Those taking Advanced Highers are not the total pool of candidates seeking access to HE, the majority of whom just take Highers).

Universities will want to have reviewed admissions policies ahead of the 2016 entry cycle.

Scottish universities and higher education institutions have all produced statements on Curriculum for Excellence and admissions, which you can find on their websites or via the links in Annex A. These may be helpful in considering how CfE might affect your admissions policy for Scottish students.

Annex A also has information in the section '*Universities Scotland information*' on an overarching CfE statement on admissions summarising all Scottish HE institutions responses and a report from 2012 on the implications for universities of CfE.

Contacts⁷

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Gavin Lee, Head of Learning & Teaching & Widening Access Policy, Universities Scotland gavin@universities-scotland.ac.uk (26 September until September 2015).

Mark Wild, Policy Officer, Universities Scotland (mark@universities-scotland.ac.uk)

4 The Scottish Baccalaureates in Expressive Arts, Languages, Science and Social Sciences consist of a coherent group of current Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications relevant subjects, as well as an interdisciplinary project.

5 Note that this was also the case before CfE was introduced.

6 <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/ACCESS%20ALL%20AREAS%20final.pdf>

7 See Annex A for contact details for SQA

Annex A: Sources of further information and key contacts⁸

- Universities Scotland information on CfE
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) information & contact details
- Education Scotland information
- Scottish universities and Higher Education Institutions admissions statements on CfE

Universities Scotland information

[Universities Scotland overview statement on CfE and admissions:](#)

[Universities Scotland report on the implications of CfE for universities Beyond the Senior Phase \(2012\):](#)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) information

[SQA web page on CfE for universities:](#)

Contact:

John Lewis, Manager - HE Liaison, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (John.Lewis@sqa.org.uk)

Education Scotland information

[Education Scotland webpage for Higher Education:](#)

[Curriculum models:](#)

[Achievement pathways:](#)

[Education Scotland Talking Heads](#) (video clips of Headteachers outlining their Senior Phase approaches and the rationale for these):

[Great Learning in Scotland](#) (leaflet outlining the key benefits for young people and examples of the different routes pupils can take throughout their education from age 3-18):

Education Scotland CfE briefings

[CfE briefing 12 - Planning for Learning part 2:](#) further learning, training and employment beyond age 16

[CfE briefing 8 – Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase: Part 3 Curriculum Planning at the Senior Phase](#)

[CfE briefing 7 – Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase: Part 2: Learning in the Senior Phase](#)

[CfE briefing 6 - Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase part 1](#)

Scottish universities and Higher Education Institutions admissions statements on CfE

Note that these are likely to be updated as time goes on and, from 2016 entry, will be the normal entry policy for Scottish domiciled applicants (who have taken SQA qualifications).

[University of Aberdeen](#)

[University of Abertay](#)

[University of Dundee](#)

[University of Edinburgh](#)

[Edinburgh Napier University](#)

[University of Glasgow](#)

[Glasgow Caledonian University](#)

[Glasgow School of Art](#)

[Heriot Watt University](#) (embedded in admissions policy)

[University of the Highlands and Islands](#)

[Open University in Scotland](#)

[Queen Margaret University](#)

[Robert Gordon University](#)

[Royal Conservatoire of Scotland](#)

[University of St Andrews](#)

[Scotland's Rural College](#)

[University of Stirling](#)

[University of Strathclyde](#)

[University of the West of Scotland](#)

