

Education Reform

Consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to The Scottish Government

Consultation Questions

SECTION 1 – VISION

As an introduction to the questions which follow in this consultation, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

1.1 The vision for Curriculum for Excellence reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland.

- Strongly Agree**
- Agree**
- Neither Agree/Disagree**
- Disagree**
- Strongly Disagree**

1.2 What do you think should be retained and/or changed?

We broadly support the aims of CfE.

Developing the four capacities will help learners as they progress beyond school to college, university, training, or work. Indeed, the four capacities align to the graduate attributes that universities are keen for their learners to develop.

It is important that CfE encourages pupils to learn and develop and grows their aspirations. It is also key to develop their academic and wider skills from early on because this provides a foundation for their future learning.

We support the opportunity for learners to have diverse opportunities to meet their needs and interests and we endorse placing learners at the centre.

SECTION 2 - CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

2.1 Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

2.2 Please share what you believe currently contributes to a coherent progression.

Universities particularly value the learning and teaching in Advanced Highers as preparation for university study. The OECD report notes that the learning and teaching in Advanced Highers is closer to CfE ideals than National 5 and Higher. We therefore think it might be worth looking at whether some Advanced Higher style aspects could be introduced to Higher.

2.3 Please share ideas you may have to improve learner progression across stages and sectors.

We have concerns that identified S3 to S4 as a difficult transition point for some learners. The review of qualifications and assessment may help to address this by reducing the immediate focus on exams.

It is important that the curriculum does not narrow too quickly: keeping pupils engaged with as many subjects as possible for as long as possible is helpful. Different learners will develop at different paces, and this keeps their options open as well as broadening skills, abilities, and lateral thinking. Narrowing the range of subjects too soon may reduce the choices for post school.

It is important that Curriculum for Excellence as a whole is coherent from 3-18 and supports progression in outcomes and competencies but also in terms of content. For example, which supports progression, not just in the way that it embeds outcomes and competencies but in the way that the content tells a coherent story in itself and leads to overall outcomes for those who stay till S6. For example, if pupils have four years of history and eight random topics, they do not develop an overview of any time period and cannot start to learn to cross-analyse.

We are concerned about the socio-economic attainment gap and would welcome steps to address it. Whilst the additional funding for schools is welcome, it may take more systematic efforts across the Scottish Government to address the issue.

We are working to widen access to university but achieving fair access will require action from across the school, college, and university sectors.

It will also be important to look at protected characteristics. Some subjects have very imbalanced examination entries by gender and this impacts on post-school options and destinations and though this is a wider issue that goes beyond schools, there is a role for schools.

It would similarly be worth looking at race and disability. Certainly, some universities have seen reductions in awarding gaps for these student groups as a result of the changes to assessment necessitated by the pandemic.

We note the recent agreement between SQA and EHRC agreeing the need for more detailed analysis of the impact of policies on different groups.

There is often little data available on attainment (one qualification at a given SCQF level is not that helpful to us). This makes it more difficult for universities to set appropriate minimum entry requirements and to gauge progress on closing the attainment gap or on whether events or policies have had a differential effect on different groups of learners.

3.1 In practice, learning communities are empowered and use the autonomy provided by Curriculum for Excellence to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

3.2 Please share ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance this in future.

Whilst we welcome the flexibility in the system, we have concerns that this can lead to unequal opportunities across the sector, and that some learners may have more limited options particularly in rural or less affluent areas.

This is perhaps particularly for Advanced Highers, but it can affect subject choices at Higher level, for example, the ability to take three sciences in one sitting at Higher. There are similar concerns about the availability of qualifications in languages and in humanities.

There is a risk that post-school choices are narrowed because the curriculum (by design or because of availability of subjects) does not offer sufficient range and opportunities.

4.1 The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency will help to address the misalignment of curriculum and assessment as outlined in the OECD report¹.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

4.2 Please share your views of the potential advantages of establishing such an Agency.

We would hope that this would allow a more holistic view of curriculum and assessment, which might offer opportunities to utilise a wider range of assessment strategies as appropriate to learning outcomes.

4.3 Please share your views of the potential disadvantages of establishing such an Agency.

Creating a body responsible for both functions might be helpful, but it would still be important that the two functions communicate well.

We do have some concerns about diverting focus from other SQA qualifications and particularly from the HN next gen project. HNs are very important as an entry route to university. We are keen to see more engagement with universities on the HN next gen project progress because we see great potential in this work to update the qualifications to better suit learners and their progression to further study or to work.

It is important that universities can work with SQA sooner rather than later to understand the new qualifications, particularly for those students who articulate into Y2 or Y3 of a degree course to ensure the continued success of this route. This depends on careful work in colleges and universities to help students transition between HN and degree study and therefore universities need to understand the new curriculum.

5.1 The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications² play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

5.2 Please identify the main factors, if any, that support a broader range of SQA qualifications being included in the curriculum in secondary schools.

¹ [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future | en | OECD](#)

² [Explore our qualifications - SQA](#)

We think it is important for schools to be able to offer an appropriate range of qualifications to their learners. As noted above, we have concerns that the range depends on the schools, particularly in rural areas and in less affluent areas. We are concerned about this in regard to Highers and Advanced Highers, but the same may well hold with other qualification options (see 3.2). We understand that the [University of Stirling](#) is currently researching subject choices in different areas. Professor Laurence Lasselle at the University of St Andrews has previously looked at [barriers to HE for pupils in rural areas](#) – participants perceived availability of subjects as a barrier to HE progression.

Some universities have worked with schools and local authorities to assist with curriculum diversity in the senior phase and particularly S6. This includes Glasgow Caledonian University's Advanced Higher Hub, which operates in Glasgow and is now piloting a project in Dumfries and Galloway, the Open University's Young Applicant Scotland Scheme and Heriot-Watt University's SCHOLAR programme.

We recognise that some learners will want to pursue other qualifications in addition to or instead of Highers.

Universities recognise foundation apprenticeships for entry in a variety of courses.

5.3 Please share any ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance the role of a broader variety of qualifications in the curriculum in secondary schools.

In universities, we see wider achievement being recognised in transcripts. We would welcome work to recognise wider attainment

Qualifications are important to universities as we use them to make decisions on whom to offer university places to – we have capped numbers and so cannot offer places to all Scottish applicants, and we also need to assess who has the potential to benefit and succeed on our courses. It is important that the grades allow institutions to distinguish between applicants. We use these qualifications as a proxy for ability and it is important that changes do not undermine our ability to do that.

However, grades and qualifications are not always whole story, and we do look beyond academic qualifications when we allocate places – notably contextual offers consider the context of the learner.

Applicants need both knowledge based, subject specific skills and to develop wider skills (including academic skills) and attributes. These wider skills and attributes may be assessed through subject courses or separately. These skills are important and indeed universities encourage all their students to develop their wider skills through their course and through the co-curriculum.

6.1 Technologies are fully and appropriately utilised as a support for curriculum and assessments.

Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree/Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6.2 Please share any comments you may have on the use of technologies to support curriculum and assessments, and what could be done to deliver improvements.

Universities have been making increasing use of technology to support curriculum and assessments and would therefore be a useful addition to any groups examining this issue. In particular, over the pandemic universities had to switch their assessments online. In some cases, this involved adapting the type of assessment, but in others it was a matter of adapting the assignment to suit the media. This included online exams for some institutions/courses. We would be very happy to share our experiences.

Equity and access are important considerations for the use of technology, and it is critical that individuals are not further disadvantaged by lack of access to equipment, reliable internet access, and suitable study space. It is important that those students who need it have appropriate assistive technology to enable their participation.

7. Please share any additional comments you have on curriculum and assessment.

Universities use a variety of assessment methods as appropriate to the course and learning outcomes under assessment. We would support this approach in national qualifications, with examinations being part of the mix for Highers and Advanced Highers. This should be done while preserving the academic rigour and standards of the qualifications.

We think it would be worth involving all education sectors in the development of qualifications to share expertise and so that all sectors understand the new qualifications and the implications for their own student intake and courses.

Work to reform qualifications and their assessments should involve universities (and colleges and employers), recognising these are major destinations for school leavers. Moreover, universities (and colleges) have extensive experience of a diverse range of assessment types, which would be helpful to this work. Furthermore, universities have had to adapt to offer online assessments during the pandemic and this could be valuable expertise for the school sector.

Universities particularly value the learning and teaching in Advanced Highers as preparation for university study. The OECD report also notes that the learning and teaching in Advanced Highers is closer to CfE ideals than National 5 and Higher. We therefore think it might be worth looking at whether some Advanced Higher style aspects could be introduced to Higher.

We note that some university entrance requirements specify attainment at National 5 level. This is usually because of profession, statutory and regulatory body

(PSRB) requirements (including the General Teaching Council for Scotland with regards initial teacher education). There will be a need to work with those Scottish and UK PSRBs where this case to reflect any relevant changes in certification.

We welcome the OECD reviews. External, independent, systemic evaluation of CfE is important and should be built in and planned for.

SECTION 3 - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

8.1 There is clarity on where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

8.2 Please indicate where you think the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence should lie.

This is not for us to say.

9.1 There is clarity on the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs for support with curriculum and assessment issues.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

9.2 Please share which aspects of the support currently provided by national agencies and other providers is working well.

n/a

9.3 Please indicate where you think greater clarity is needed in relation to the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs / requests for support with curriculum and assessment issues.

It can be difficult for stakeholders from outside the school sector to access information, both because it is not always clear where it can be found and also because of the volume of material. That can decrease the extent of engagement with CfE which might otherwise take place, though individual universities, and also the Enhancement Themes (which QAA facilitate) have at various times facilitated schools and universities working together to consider transition issues.

When CfE was first implemented, Education Scotland put together a dedicated page for universities to see key information, which was helpful and highlighted the key information universities needed.

It is similarly difficult to access material at times from SQA. This year we eventually worked with SQA to get information on changes to HN qualification so we could identify any issues for articulation to universities – this is important because universities needed to know if there would be gaps in articulating students' knowledge so that they could address this.

Information on attainment has been particularly hard to come by, but this information is useful in setting entry requirements, and it is particularly useful to have information on SIMD20 attainment to inform minimum entry requirements. It would be useful to keep this under review as and when widening access measures change – for example, if plans to introduce a measure based on eligibility for free school meals come to fruition.

10.1 There is clarity on where high quality support for leadership and professional learning can be accessed to support practitioners.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

10.2 Please share any comments you may have on support for leadership and professional learning.

n/a

11.1 There is sufficient trust with all stakeholders, including children, young people, parents & carers, so they are genuinely involved in decision making.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

11.2 Please share any ideas you may have on how trust and decision making can be further improved.

There have been times when we have felt heard and seen our views taken seriously and impact on decisions. There have been other times when we have felt we have been invited so people can say we have been consulted, or we have only been consulted very late in the day.

This can be frustrating because universities have a lot of expertise in curriculum and assessment and sharing this could be beneficial. Increased engagement would also help universities understand more about schools.

12.1 Independent inspection has an important role to play in scrutiny and evaluation, enhancing improvement and building capacity.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

12.2 Please give examples of how you would like to see scrutiny and evaluation being carried out in future.

There are others better placed to comment. In the university sector, we have found an enhancement-led approach has brought many benefits and we also gain from an approach via our enhancement themes that encourages collaboration in enhancement and learning from one another.

13. Please share any additional comments on roles and responsibilities in Scotland's education system.

n/a

SECTION 4 - REPLACING THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY AND REFORMING EDUCATION SCOTLAND

Removing Scrutiny (Inspection and review) from Education Scotland

14. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example what form should this agency take)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example the development of a new national approach to inspection including alignment with other scrutiny functions)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example whether the independence of the inspectorate could be jeopardised by change)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

n/a

Further Reform of Education Scotland

15. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on how the functions currently housed in Education Scotland could be reformed.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example which functions should continue to sit within a reformed Education Scotland, and are there any functions which could be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities reform could present (for example should more prominence be given to aspects of Education Scotland's role)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example disruption of service to education establishments and settings)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

n/a

Replacing SQA

16. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example could a function be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example should more prominence be given to an aspect of SQA's role)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example loss of income, confusion as to system of awards in Scotland)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

We note that SQA currently combines both regulatory and exam setting functions. This is not necessarily the case in the rest of the UK.

SQA offers other qualifications including HNCs and HNDs. We would not want these qualifications to be neglected because of the focus on (necessary) change for the national qualifications. We particularly would not want the HN Next Gen work to be neglected.

Considering the Establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment Agency

17. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example are there alternative models for this reform?)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example what should the role of the new agency be?)
- c) the risks associated with any reform
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

If you have any additional comments and suggestions relating to this consultation, please send them to EducationReform@gov.scot