

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE – REALISING THE BENEFITS IN FULL

Purpose:

1. At the first meeting of the Curriculum and Assessment Board there was consideration of some possible themes for the Board's focus at future meetings. In discussion there emerged a general consensus that an important first step was to revisit the fundamentals of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in order for the Board to determine where its focus should be.
2. This paper, therefore:
 - **summarises the educational outcomes that CfE was intended to achieve** for children and young people;
 - uses available evidence to **provide an analysis of how effectively CfE has achieved those outcomes** to date and, in particular, to identify where the benefits, as originally intended, may not yet have been realised in full; and
 - **seeks the Board's views** on the analysis presented and on the areas that should be prioritised for addressing.

Why Curriculum for Excellence?

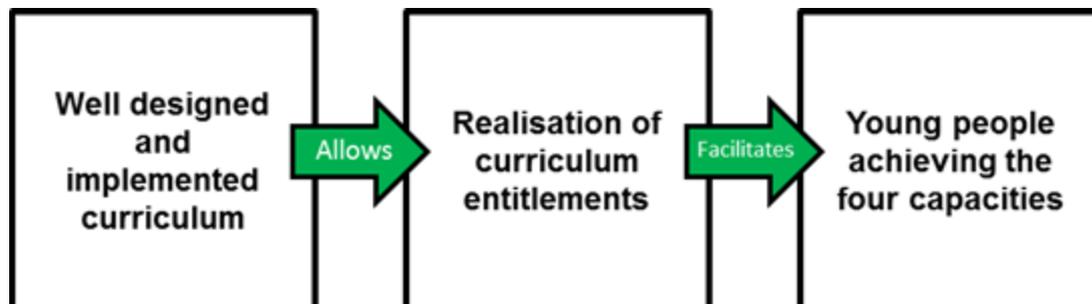
3. CfE is a broad curriculum framework that aims to provide a coherent curriculum, assessment and qualifications approach for children and young people from the ages of 3 to 18. It was designed to promote young people's holistic achievement of their capacities as *successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors* and *responsible citizens* – the four capacities¹.
4. CfE also provides six entitlements that every learner should receive² :
 - a curriculum which is coherent from 3-18;
 - a broad general education, including the experiences and outcomes well planned across all curriculum areas, from early years through the S3;
 - a senior phase of education after S3 which provides opportunity to obtain qualifications as well as to continue to develop the four capacities;
 - opportunities for developing skills for learning; skills for life and skills for work with a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing;
 - personal support to enable learners to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence can provide; and
 - support in moving into positive and sustained destinations beyond school.
5. The successful development of the CfE entitlements to enable young people to achieve the four capacities as intended requires practitioners in both the BGE and senior phase to adhere to the following principles of curriculum design:
 - challenge and enjoyment;
 - breadth;
 - progression;
 - depth;

¹ See Scottish Executive (2006) - '*A Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 1*'

² See Scottish Government (2008) – '*Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching*'

- personalisation and choice;
- coherence; and
- relevance.

Fig. 1 Process for facilitating young people's achievement of the *Four Capacities*:



The Implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*

6. There are many strong examples across the system of where CfE is working well in practice. In its independent evaluation of CfE, the OECD concluded that 'there is a great deal to be positive about in such a review: learners are enthusiastic and motivated, teachers are engaged and professional, and system leaders are highly committed.'³ Supporting those findings, Education Scotland's overview of evidence from inspections - *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (QUISE 2012-16)* - detailed a number of strengths in the quality of professional practice and provision across Scottish education. The report notes that inspectors had observed many examples of outstanding and innovative practice which are securing positive outcomes for children and young people⁴. Scotland also sees consistently strong attainment results in National Qualifications and our young people continue to leave school with a greater range of qualifications, skills-based awards and achievements.

7. However, it is also clear from evidence from the Education Policy Review carried out by the OECD and from Education Scotland inspections, as well as that from other sources including SQA Fieldwork, PISA and SSLN Results and academic research, that there is scope for the intended benefits of CfE to be realised more fully.

8. The OECD review highlighted that CfE was at 'a *watershed* moment'⁵ as after a decade spent putting in place a Scotland-wide curriculum programme there was now the need to move beyond system management. There seems value at this juncture, therefore, to look at the evidence available in order to assess where CfE's benefits as originally conceived are not being realised in full.

³ OECD (2015). *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*, p.9.

⁴ Education Scotland (2017) *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016*, p. 3.

⁵ OECD (2015). *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*, p.10.

Are learners getting the full benefits from all the curriculum entitlements?

Taking each entitlement in turn:

Entitlement: A curriculum which is coherent from 3-18

9. *Analysis:* Across all parts of the system, there is a need for improvements to curriculum design in order to ensure that learners consistently receive the breadth, depth and challenge in learning with smooth, well-paced progression as envisaged by CfE. Schools need to be clear about the curriculum design decisions that have been made and why, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the learners in their setting. The QUISE 2012-16 Report noted “In this context of deep and comprehensive curricular reform, our inspectors found that it proved challenging for establishments and services to move in one bound to establish a curriculum which delivers fully on the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence. This is reflected in a relatively high level of variability in the quality indicator grades inspectors awarded for ‘curriculum’ and ‘improvement through self-evaluation’ during the period of this report.”⁶

10. Ensuring a clear narrative and understanding of CfE is a key component in ensuring consistency across schools. Clarifying the scope and intention of CfE was one of the key recommendations of the OECD in its review of CfE, noting that “CfE’s scope still needs clarification: sometimes it is understood as a wide-ranging set of reforms whereas it would be better if it were interpreted more strictly as curriculum and related assessment and pedagogy...Clarification would help to build forward momentum and a clear narrative”⁷. Calls for clarification have also been made by Professor Graham Donaldson (“over time we lost the narrative: we no longer know what curriculum for excellence and its fundamentals are”⁸) and inspectors have also noted too many settings where the rationale for the curriculum at local level is not clearly understood or defined⁹.

11. Achieving a coherent curriculum requires learners to have the opportunity to make links between experiences across curriculum areas while also experiencing smooth progression between curriculum levels. We need to consider how best to support and maintain coherence, especially in secondary education with its increased number of periods and practitioners. Additionally, the aim of coherence to support the development of the four capacities needs to be protected as learners are prepared for national and other qualifications. There may also be issues to explore in terms of the impact of the “multi-layered” curriculum framework itself. For instance, Professor Mark Priestley has pointed to the several layers of curriculum framework (Experiences and Outcomes, Benchmarks) and the risk that this leads to “box ticking”, and a failure to build deep understanding¹⁰.

⁶ Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016, p. 2.

⁷ OECD (2015). Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective p 13

⁸ Education and Skills Committee, Scottish Parliament (29 November 2017). Official Report.

⁹ Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 – 2016, p 11

¹⁰ Priestley M & Minty S (2013) *Curriculum for Excellence: 'A brilliant idea, but. . .'*, Scottish Educational Review, 45 (1), pp. 39-52.

12. In relation to transitions, Education Scotland have reported that “children were generally very well supported to make a smooth transition from early learning to primary school, and from primary to the secondary stages. However, there is still room for schools to build on children’s prior learning more effectively as they make transitions from stage to stage”¹¹. The transition from the latter stages of the BGE to the senior phase is particularly important, with the need to ensure appropriate pace, challenge and rigour in S1-3 that sufficiently prepare learners for the increased challenges of the senior phase. Inspection evidence found that many schools need to develop the “quality of the broad general education they offer in the first three years of secondary school, to ensure it provides sufficient depth and challenge to enable all learners to achieve their potential”¹². This analysis is supported by the SQA’s field work studies with learners in both 2016 and 2017¹³.

Entitlement: A broad general education, including well planned experiences and outcomes across all curriculum areas from early years through to S3.

13. *Analysis:* Education Scotland inspection evidence demonstrates that most schools have established, or are putting in place, structures to promote breadth of learning across the eight curriculum areas in ways that allow links to be drawn between those areas¹⁴. However, inspection reports have also shown that “some schools’ approaches to redesigning the curriculum to help children experience a challenging and motivating broad general education are not yet effective or in some instances, aligned with expectations. In these schools there has been too much emphasis on ‘covering’ experiences and outcomes at the expense of depth and challenge.”¹⁵

14. We need to consider factors such as the time and capacity required for teachers to prepare, and engage with, the curriculum and the focus on the new qualifications throughout the implementation of CfE. Glasgow City Council’s Report on Broad General Education Review Visits 2015/16 stated that “Whole school approaches to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing were variable in quality and this focus may have suffered in the secondary sector from the drive to implement national qualifications”¹⁶.

15. There is research evidence that supports greater discussion of intended curricula and the ways in which they are implemented. As an example of this, in relation to engagement with the curriculum, Professor Mark Priestley¹⁷ has made the point that there needs to be more support for practitioners for sense making and collaborative professional enquiry in relation to curriculum making in order that they can assume a greater ownership of it and are truly empowered to lead learning. He

¹¹ Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012-2016 p33

¹² Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (2017) p6

¹³ SQA (2017). National Course design and assessment – SQA fieldwork visits Year 2 (2016–17), p.10.

¹⁴ Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (2017) p15

¹⁵ Education Scotland (2017) Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (2017) p15

¹⁶ Glasgow City Council - Report on Broad General Education Review Visits 2015- 2016 p5

¹⁷ Priestley M & Drew V (2016) Teachers as agents of curriculum change: closing the gap between purpose and practice. European Conference for Educational Research, Dublin, 23-26 September 2016. Available from:

<http://hdl.handle.net/1893/24179>

has highlighted recent research in Finland¹⁸ which suggests that the investment made there in sense-making activity with teachers is the key process behind their successful curriculum reforms.

Entitlement: A senior phase of education after S3 which provides opportunity to obtain qualifications as well as to continue to develop the four capacities.

16. *Analysis:* Whilst inspectors found many schools have responded well to the challenges of designing a range of pathways for learners, they noted that all schools require to continue to focus on ensuring all young people have appropriate learning pathways to enable them to make the best progress. Key areas for improvement included: a greater emphasis on collaborative curriculum planning across education partners; strengthened partnership working with families and communities; ensuring the curriculum is flexible enough to meet the needs of all learners; and a focus on employability and greater opportunities for work-based learning pathways. These, along with wider issues in relation to the design and delivery of the senior phase curriculum are explored in greater detail in paper CAB-02(03).

Entitlement: Opportunities for developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work with a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

17. *Analysis:* Literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are core to education and skills development across all aspects of learning, teaching and skills development and are the responsibilities of all teachers and practitioners. However, Inspectors have noted variability in the extent to which literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing were taught consistently and confidently across the curriculum, commenting that “as yet, the potential impact of establishing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing areas as cross-cutting priorities for all teachers has not been fully realised.”¹⁹

18. For literacy and numeracy, information on performance is evidenced in the experimental *Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels 2016/17* data published in December 2017²⁰. Whilst it is important to recognise that this data collection is still in an experimental stage, the results indicated a fall throughout the primary stages in the percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE level for their stage in each of the four organisers (reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy). In secondary, whilst the percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better in each organiser is consistently between 88 and 91 per cent, only around half of S3 pupils were reported to have achieved Fourth Level in each organiser.

¹⁸ Pietarinen, J., Pyhältö, K. & Soini, T. (2016). Large-scale curriculum reform in Finland – exploring the interrelation between implementation strategy, the function of the reform, and curriculum coherence. *The Curriculum Journal*, 28, 22-40.

¹⁹ Education Scotland (2017) *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016*, p. 54.

²⁰ Scottish Government (2017). *Achievement of curriculum for excellence levels 2016-17*.

19. Data from the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)²¹, which involved the first full cohort of learners to be educated wholly under CfE, showed Scotland's scores were similar to the OECD average for all three areas tested (reading, science and mathematics) but that overall performance was lower in science and in reading compared to 2012, and unchanged in mathematics. Similarly, data from the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) from 2011 - 2016²² showed: a static picture for attainment in listening and talking; a decline in P7 and S2 in writing with no change in P4; and a decline in reading attainment levels in P4 and P7 with no change in S2. It also showed a decline in numeracy attainment in P4 and P7 with no change in S2. Furthermore, the teacher questionnaire associated with the SSLN data collection found that teachers felt less confident delivering literacy and numeracy education when it fell outside of their subject specialism. Supporting this, the SQA's 2017 fieldwork showed that a number of subject teachers expressed a view that attainment in their subject was being affected by weaker literacy or numeracy skills amongst learners²³.

20. In relation to other skills for learning, life and work, the publication of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy has helped to ensure greater focus and Education Scotland have seen "increasing evidence of effective partnership working between community learning and development providers and schools... in secondary schools, local businesses and community organisations are increasingly contributing to the curriculum. This is leading to a clearer focus in some schools on improving skills for learning, life and work."²⁴ Similarly, inspection evidence found that "the development of skills for learning, life and work was embedded in the curriculum in almost all colleges. Inspectors observed learners being encouraged by staff to reflect regularly on the development of these skills and track their progress during their programme. In most programmes, staff supported learners well to make connections between their classroom learning and the world of work."²⁵

21. Although there are promising signs in relation to skills for learning, life and work, Education Scotland has stated that further improvements can be made in relation to links between schools, colleges and employers.

Entitlement: Personal support to enable learners to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence can provide.

22. *Analysis:* The assessment of learner progress has been identified as an area requiring improvement and is a theme which has been highlighted by the OECD and through Education Scotland inspections. The OECD noted that "too many teachers are unclear what should be assessed...[and] current assessment arrangements do not provide sufficiently robust information, whether for system-level policy-making, or for local authorities, or for individual schools or across CfE domains for learners and

²¹ Scottish Government (2016) *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015: Highlights from Scotland's Results*.

²² Scottish Government (2017) *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2016 (Literacy)* and Scottish Government (2016) *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2015 (Numeracy)*

²³ SQA (2017). National Course design and assessment – SQA fieldwork visits Year 2 (2016–17), p.9.

²⁴ Education Scotland (2017) *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (2017)* p 36

²⁵ Education Scotland (2017) *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016 (2017)* p 44

their teachers”²⁶. School inspections suggest that many settings still require to do more to ensure children are making progress in their learning and that attainment and achievement are improving. In order to better inform progression pathways throughout both BGE and senior phase, settings need to be supported in putting in place effective approaches to assessment and monitoring, in addition to providing personal support to learners.²⁷

23. It is important to note that, in response to the OECD and other analyses, a deliberately planned system of national interventions has been put in place to provide a robust evidence base to support improvements to assessment. Teacher judgement of achievement of levels is central and is underpinned by assessment, supported by the introduction in this academic year of Scottish Nationalised Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) in literacy and numeracy and the publication of benchmarks for all curriculum areas in order to provide a more explicit and clear statement of standards. A new national programme of Quality Assurance and Moderation has also been established to provide more support and improve confidence and understanding amongst teachers. A new BGE Improvement Tool is also in the process of being rolled out across Scotland. The collection and analysis of the achievement of CfE levels in literacy and numeracy needs to be followed through by targeted intervention to help learners who are not currently reaching national standards. There is a need to ensure that the data is used for improvement purposes rather than just national reporting once per year as part of the National Improvement Framework.

Entitlement: Support in moving into positive and sustained destinations beyond school

24. *Analysis:* The percentage of learners in Scotland moving onto positive destinations after leaving school has increased modestly since 2013 and remains above 90%²⁸. This can be seen as a result of the increased focus on employability and improving outcomes under DYW and as a result, education establishments working hard to develop effective partnerships with SDS, employers, further education, higher education and the wider community. This work has been highlighted in Education Scotland’s inspection evidence and the conclusions of SQA’s field work 2016-17²⁹. As part of the 15-24 Learner Journey Review, the Scottish Government has been looking at young people’s transitions beyond school and ensuring that learner journey for young people in Scotland is as effective and efficient as possible.

Conclusions:

25. The analysis provided in this paper identifies a number of areas where there may be scope for further development and improvements in relation to the

²⁶ OECD (2015). *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*, p.11.

²⁷ Education Scotland (2017) *Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012 - 2016*, p. 54.

²⁸ Scottish Government (2016) *Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* p 10

²⁹ Education Scotland (2017) and SQA (2017) *National Course design and assessment SQA fieldwork visits Year 2 (2016–17)*

implementation of CfE to ensure the benefits can be realised in full. Board members are invited to consider this analysis:

- Does the Board agree with the analysis provided?
- Does it capture the key themes which will help to determine our success in achieving the intended benefits of CfE?
- The analysis provided in this paper suggests the Board may wish to consider prioritising its focus on the following areas:
 - The CfE narrative – clarity of understanding
 - The 'responsibilities for all' – literacy, numeracy and health and well-being
 - Curriculum design - responding to the challenge: P7 to S3 transitions and preparing for the senior phase