

Public Document Pack



To: Councillor Malik, Convener; Councillor Imrie, Vice Convener; Councillor Jennifer Stewart, the Depute Provost; Councillors Alphonse, Bell, Cameron, Lesley Dunbar, Greig, Houghton, Hutchison, Macdonald, MacGregor and Mennie; and Mrs Louise Bruce (Parent Representative – Primary / ASN), Reverend Shuna Dicks (Church of Scotland Religious Representative), Mr John Murray (Roman Catholic Religious Representative), Mr Mike Paul (Teacher Representative - Secondary Schools), Mr Rick Sansom (Parent Representative - Secondary / ASN) and Miss Pamela Scott (Teacher Representative - Primary Schools) and one vacancy (Third Religious Representative).

Town House,
ABERDEEN, 15 September 2021

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE

The Members of the **EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE** are requested to meet in the **Council Chamber - Town House** on **THURSDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 10.00am.**

The meeting will be webcast and a live stream can be viewed on the Council's website. Aberdeen City Council webcasts - <https://aberdeen.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

FRASER BELL
CHIEF OFFICER - GOVERNANCE

B U S I N E S S

NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS

1.1 There are no items of urgent business at this time

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT BUSINESS

2.1 Members are requested to determine that any exempt business be considered with the press and public excluded

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 Members are requested to declare any interests (Pages 5 - 6)

DEPUTATIONS

- 4.1 There are no requests for deputation at this time

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- 5.1 Minute of Previous Meeting of 3 June 2021 (Pages 7 - 14)

NOTICES OF MOTION

- 6.1 There are no notices of motion at this time

COMMITTEE PLANNER

- 7.1 Committee Business Planner (Pages 15 - 20)

REFERRALS FROM COUNCIL, COMMITTEES AND SUB COMMITTEES

- 8.1 There are no referrals at this time

PERFORMANCE AND RISK

- 9.1 Performance Management Framework - Education Operations - CUS/21/213 (Pages 21 - 36)

- 9.2 Education Improvement Journey Tracker and National Improvement Framework Plan 2021/22 - CUS/21/212 (Pages 37 - 140)

GENERAL BUSINESS

- 10.1 Evaluation of Aberdeen Summer of Play Programme 2021/2022 - OPE/21/217 (Pages 141 - 170)

- 10.2 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) on Curriculum for Excellence - OPE/21/187 (Pages 171 - 374)

- 10.3 Digitisation of the Music Service - OPE/21/219 (Pages 375 - 388)

10.4 Senior Phase - OPE/21/218 (Pages 389 - 414)

10.5 Platinum Jubilee Public Holiday - OPE/21/225 (Pages 415 - 418)

Impact Assessments related to reports on this agenda can be viewed at
[Integrated Impact Assessments](#)

Should you require any further information about this agenda, please contact Stephanie
Dunsmuir, email sdunsmuir@aberdeencity.gov.uk

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

You must consider at the earliest stage possible whether you have an interest to declare in relation to any matter which is to be considered. You should consider whether reports for meetings raise any issue of declaration of interest. Your declaration of interest must be made under the standing item on the agenda, however if you do identify the need for a declaration of interest only when a particular matter is being discussed then you must declare the interest as soon as you realise it is necessary. The following wording may be helpful for you in making your declaration.

I declare an interest in item (x) for the following reasons

For example, I know the applicant / I am a member of the Board of X / I am employed by...

and I will therefore withdraw from the meeting room during any discussion and voting on that item.

OR

I have considered whether I require to declare an interest in item (x) for the following reasons however, having applied the objective test, I consider that my interest is so remote / insignificant that it does not require me to remove myself from consideration of the item.

OR

I declare an interest in item (x) for the following reasons however I consider that a specific exclusion applies as my interest is as a member of xxx, which is

- (a) a devolved public body as defined in Schedule 3 to the Act;
- (b) a public body established by enactment or in pursuance of statutory powers or by the authority of statute or a statutory scheme;
- (c) a body with whom there is in force an agreement which has been made in pursuance of Section 19 of the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Act 1990 by Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise for the discharge by that body of any of the functions of Scottish Enterprise or, as the case may be, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; or
- (d) a body being a company:-
 - i. established wholly or mainly for the purpose of providing services to the Councillor's local authority; and
 - ii. which has entered into a contractual arrangement with that local authority for the supply of goods and/or services to that local authority.

OR

I declare an interest in item (x) for the following reasons.....and although the body is covered by a specific exclusion, the matter before the Committee is one that is quasi-judicial / regulatory in nature where the body I am a member of:

- is applying for a licence, a consent or an approval
- is making an objection or representation
- has a material interest concerning a licence consent or approval
- is the subject of a statutory order of a regulatory nature made or proposed to be made by the local authority.... and I will therefore withdraw from the meeting room during any discussion and voting on that item.

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 3 June 2021. Minute of Meeting of the EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE. **Present:-** Councillor Malik, Convener; Councillor Imrie, Vice-Convener; Councillor Barney Crockett, the Lord Provost (as substitute for Councillor Bell); and Councillors Alphonse, Boulton (as substitute for Councillor Jennifer Stewart, the Depute Provost), Cameron, Lesley Dunbar, Greig, Hutchison, Macdonald, MacGregor (for all articles with the exception of article 8), MacKenzie (as substitute for Councillor Houghton for articles 1 to 6), Mason (as substitute for Councillor Houghton for article 7 onwards), Mennie and Radley (as substitute for Councillor MacGregor for article 8 only). **External Members:-** Mrs Louise Bruce (Parent Representative - Primary Schools) (for articles 1 to 7), Reverend Shuna Dicks (Church of Scotland Religious Representative) (for articles 1 to 7), Mr John Murray (Roman Catholic Religious Representative) (for articles 1 to 10), Mr Mike Paul (Teacher Representative - Secondary Schools) (for articles 1 to 7), Mr Rick Sansom (Parent Representative - Secondary / ASN) and Miss Pamela Scott (Teacher Representative - Primary Schools) (for articles 1 to 10).

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found [here](#).

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1. The Committee noted the following declaration of interest intimated at this stage:-

Councillor Imrie declared an interest in item 10.5 (Summer of Play) by virtue of her appointment to the Board of Sport Aberdeen but did not consider that the nature of her interest required her to leave the meeting for this item.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 17 MARCH 2021

2. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 17 March 2021 for approval.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute as a correct record.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER

3. The Committee had before it the committee business planner as prepared by the Chief Officer – Governance.

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE
3 June 2021

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that item 4 (Education Improvement Journey and National Improvement Framework) which had been withdrawn from the agenda would be reported to the September meeting;
- (ii) to note that the Clerk would amend the description at item 21 (Campus Model for School Provision) to include the update provided by the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord at the March meeting in respect of Bucksburn and Countesswells; and
- (iii) to otherwise note the planner.

EDUCATION OPERATIONS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK - CUS/21/131

4. With reference to article 4 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Customer Services which presented an update on the status of key performance measures relating to the Education Operational cluster.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to the data.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the performance information contained in the report Appendix.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that the Chief Officer – Education would circulate information on the Equity Framework when it was available (expected around August 2021);
- (ii) to note that further information on the ABZWorks website, a website being launched to clarify routes in growth areas, would be provided in the next update on the Senior Phase, due in September;
- (iii) to thank all officers and teaching staff for their efforts in respect of the cancellation of exams / assessment process; and
- (iv) to otherwise note the report.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT PLAN 2021-2024 - OPE/21/134

5. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Operating Officer which sought approval for the refreshed Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan 2021-2024.

Mrs Bruce thanked officers for what she said was an excellent Plan and asked that it be put on record that it was important that there was buy-in from all schools to use parents as partners.

The report recommended:-

that Committee –

- (a) note the evaluation of the existing plan;

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE
3 June 2021

- (b) approve the new Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan 2021-2024; and
- (c) instruct the Chief Education Officer to report progress through the regular updates provided to Committee on the service's delivery of the National Improvement Framework Plan.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) in relation to the query from Mr Sansom in respect of the use of remote parents' evenings, to note that officers would ensure that professional associations would also be consulted in any further discussions on the use of these; and
- (ii) to approve the recommendations contained in the report.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS - OPE/21/139

6. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Customer Services which provided an annual update on the uptake of free school meals for the period 2020/21.

The report recommended:-

that Committee note the increase in the registration for free school meals during 2020/21.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to thank all of the officers who had been involved in working to obtain the necessary information to ensure children receive their free school meal entitlement;
- (ii) to welcome the increase in uptake of free school meals across the city as a result of positive intervention from both the Scottish Government and officers within Aberdeen City Council; and
- (iii) to note that secondary school free school meals uptake is still below primary school level and instruct the Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to further investigate how to improve uptake in our secondary schools and report back to a future meeting of the committee.

PROPOSED CONSULTATION TO ESTABLISH CATCHMENT AREAS FOR GAELIC MEDIUM EDUCATION - RES/21/133

7. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Resources which sought approval to launch a statutory consultation on proposals to establish catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education provision at Hazlehead Academy and Gilcomstoun School.

The report recommended:-

that Committee –

- (a) instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to undertake a statutory public consultation commencing in August 2021, on proposals to establish catchment areas for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Hazlehead Academy

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE
3 June 2021

- and Gilcomstoun School, as defined within the maps at Appendix 1 of the report, and
- (b) instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to report back to the Committee on the outcomes of the consultation at its next available meeting following conclusion of the consultation process.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener moved the recommendations as set out in the report.

Councillor Greig, seconded by Councillor Cameron, moved as an amendment:-

That the Committee:-

- (a) instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to undertake a statutory public consultation commencing in August 2021, on proposals to establish the city boundary as the catchment area for the Gaelic Medium Education provision; and
- (b) instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to report back to the Committee on the outcomes of the consultation at its next available meeting following conclusion of the consultation process.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (8) – the Convener; the Vice Convener; the Lord Provost; Councillors Boulton, Lesley Dunbar, Mason and Macdonald; and Reverend Dicks; for the amendment (8) – Councillors Alphonse, Cameron, Greig, Hutchison, MacGregor and Mennie; and Mrs Bruce and Mr Murray; declined to vote (3) – Mr Paul, Mr Sansom and Miss Scott.

There being an equality of votes, in terms of Standing Order 32.7, the Convener exercised his casting vote in favour of the motion.

The Committee resolved:-

to agree the motion and thereby approve the report recommendations.

LOCHSIDE ACADEMY - TRANSPORT & SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS ANNUAL UPDATE - OPE/21/110

8. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Operating Officer which provided the annual update on the performance of the transport services and arrangements for pupils accessing Lochside Academy and on the success of provisions in relation to the safe walking routes to Lochside Academy.

The report recommended:-

that Committee –

- (a) note the outcome of the 2021 annual review for transport and safe routes to school for Lochside Academy;

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- (b) note that a Service Update will be submitted on 23 September 2021, providing detail on the newly contracted services for the 2021/22 Academic Year; and
- (c) agree that no further annual update reports are required to be submitted.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener, moved the recommendations as contained in the report.

Councillor Mennie, seconded by Councillor Radley, moved as an amendment:-

That Committee:-

- (a) notes that significant numbers of children attending Lochside Academy continue to cross Wellington Road outwith the safe crossing points by climbing over the vehicle guard rail separating the north and southbound carriageways between the Souterhead Roundabout and the junction with Charleston Road North;
- (b) refers the matter to the Operational Delivery Committee, with the recommendation that they instruct the Chief Officer - Operations and Protective Services to investigate potential measures that could prevent pedestrians crossing Wellington Road between these two junctions, and report to City Growth and Resources Committee with costed proposals and funding options;
- (c) notes the impact of the pandemic and the unforeseen disruption caused in 2020 as a result of the pandemic;
- (d) instructs the Chief Officer – Operations and Protective Services to undertake a further annual update next year on Lochside Academy transport and safe routes to school and report back to committee; and
- (e) notes that the Lochside Parent Voice have expressed concerns regarding the pick up and drop off arrangements for parents at the school, whereby unnecessary vehicle movements have taken place within the school grounds during drop off and pick up times and that this is a common problem across the City school estate, and instructs the Chief Officer - Education to consult with parents, carers, school staff and other interested parties to ascertain where there may be issues in the school estate as a result of additional vehicles during drop off and pick up times, and in conjunction with the Chief Officer - Operations and Protective Services, report back to committee in two cycles on the findings with proposals for any measures which could be implemented to address these problems.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (8) – the Convener; the Vice Convener; the Lord Provost; Councillors Boulton, Lesley Dunbar, Mason and Macdonald; and Mr Sansom; for the amendment (8) – Councillors Alphonse, Cameron, Greig, Hutchison, Mennie and Radley; and Mr Murray and Miss Scott; absent from the division (3) – Mrs Bruce, Reverend Dicks and Mr Paul.

There being an equality of votes, in terms of Standing Order 32.7 the Convener used his casting vote in favour of the motion.

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE
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The Committee resolved:-

to approve the motion and thereby approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

ABERDEEN SUMMER OF PLAY PROGRAMME 2021/2022 - OPE/21/129

9. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Operating Officer which sought approval for a proposed summer programme to support the wellbeing of children and young people across Aberdeen City who had been most impacted by the pandemic.

The report recommended:-

that Committee –

- (a) note the consultation undertaken to help inform the Summer of Play programme as contained in Appendix A;
- (b) approve the skeletal Summer of Play programme outlined in Appendix B and note that the full grant awarded by Scottish Government would be used to fund the programme;
- (c) note that the Scottish Government was to fund free school meal vouchers during the summer holidays;
- (d) instruct the Chief Social Work Officer and Chief Education Officer to develop and implement an awareness raising campaign across all partners involved in the Summer of Play programme, designed to, 'make every contact count' in order to further safeguard children and young people;
- (e) approve the establishment and launch of a Children's Giving Appeal across the city in order to ensure that children can access the Summer of Play programme;
- (f) instruct the Chief Officer Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to work with the Fairer Aberdeen Board to manage the distribution of monies to community groups; and
- (g) instruct the Chief Education Officer to finalise, publicise and implement a programme in keeping with the skeletal Summer of Play programme and provide a service update to members of the Education Operational Delivery Committee on the impact of the programme on the health and wellbeing of those children who participated in the programme.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that the Chief Officer – Education would liaise outwith the meeting with Councillor Alphonse in relation to sponsorship opportunities;
- (ii) to note that the Chief Officer – Education would liaise with the Lord Provost and Depute Provost in respect of their involvement in promoting the Summer of Play programme;
- (iii) to note that officers would be required to report to the Scottish Government on the outcomes from the funding received and so would report those outcomes to the Committee at a future meeting;
- (iv) to thank all officers and partners who had worked together to create the programme; and
- (v) to approve the recommendations contained in the report.

EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE
3 June 2021

SUPPORTING LEARNERS - OPE/21/132

10. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Operating Officer which provided an update on the progress of the Supporting Learners Workstream, including the ongoing work to better understand the changing needs of children and young people in Aberdeen City in the context of data analysis.

As requested at the meeting of the Committee of 20 January 2021, the report also included information about the approaches adopted to better secure flexibility and agility within the system.

The report recommended:-
that Committee –

- (a) note the approach being taken and progress made to date; and
- (b) instruct the Chief Education Officer/Programme Manager to report on the programme within 3 committee cycles.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that officers would include an update on the work being done to promote the use of the Early Intervention Consultation option and the impact of this in the next report back to Committee; and
- (ii) to approve the recommendations.

INSPECTION REPORTING - OPE/21/122

11. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Operating Officer provided oversight of the outcomes of the reviews that had been undertaken by Education Scotland over the course of the pandemic.

The report recommended:-
that Committee –

- (a) note the contents of the report; and
- (b) instruct the Chief Education Officer to continue to engage positively with National Overviews of Practice and ensure key learning is taken account of in education service delivery.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that the report on the Alternative Certification Model had just been published and that officers would circulate this to Members outwith the meeting; and
- (ii) to approve the recommendations.

- **COUNCILLOR M. TAUQEER MALIK, Convener**

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	EDUCATION OPERATIONAL DELIVERY COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER The Business Planner details the reports which have been instructed by the Committee as well as reports which the Functions expect to be submitting for the calendar year.								
2	Report Title	Minute Reference/Committee Decision or Purpose of Report	Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
3	23 September 2021								
4	Performance Management Framework Report – Education Operations	To present the latest performance for the cycle		Alex Paterson	Data and Insights	Customer	1.1.3		
5	Education Improvement Journey and National Improvement Framework	EOD Committee 19/04/18 - to instruct the Chief Operating Officer to track progress against the proposed KPIs in order to report progress to the Education Operational Delivery Committee. Reporting will comprise (a) a yearly progress report based on validated data and (b) a six monthly update to provide an indication of progress to that point. This report will also cover an update on the National Improvement Framework Plan	Deferred from June 2021 to September meeting	Reyna Stewart	Data and Insights	Customer	1.1.3		
6	Platinum Jubilee Public Holiday	To seek authority to apply to the Scottish Government for an additional closure to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee subject to the decision taken at the Staff Governance Committee on 28 September 2021		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Customer	1.1.1		
7	Summer of Play Evaluation	EOD Committee 23/06/21 - to request that an evaluation of the Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play 2021/22 be shared with Committee at the end of the programme		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
8	Digitisation of Music Service	Council Budget 11/03/21 - to reject the £200,000 saving for the Music Service and instruct the Chief Education Officer to report to the Education Operational Delivery Committee by September 2021 on how the Music Service could use digitalisation to offer a more affordable offer to families and extend the reach of the service. As part of any redesign the Music Service should explore opportunities to collaborate to establish an online Music Service to ensure opportunities are open for all wanting to use the Music Service		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
9	Senior Phase	EOD Committee 26/11/20 - The Committee resolved to note the analysis of performance across the senior phase and how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on employability and training options for young people leaving school; approve the proposed direction of travel to ensure that the partnership curriculum ideally supported school leavers into further, higher education or employment; approve the education service framework in Appendix B and instruct the Chief Education Officer to update the framework in Appendix B if updated national guidance was published; and instruct the Chief Education Officer to report on progress within 3 Committee cycles.		Alex Duncan	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
10	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) on Curriculum for Excellence	The report aims to provide Elected Members with oversight of the published OECD report which was instructed by Scottish Government to help assess the impact of Curriculum for Excellence. This report is presented in place of the standing 'Inspection Reporting' report.		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.1		

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Report Title	Minute Reference/Committee Decision or Purpose of Report	Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2	Inspection Reporting	A standing item to report on the outcome of school inspections if required		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.6	R	There have been no inspections to report
11									
12	25 November 2021								
13	Education Improvement Journey	EOD Committee 19/04/18 - to instruct the Chief Operating Officer to track progress against the proposed KPIs in order to report progress to the Education Operational Delivery Committee. Reporting will comprise (a) a yearly progress report based on validated data and (b) a six monthly update to provide an indication of progress to that point.	Reports will be presented approx May and November each year	Reyna Stewart	Data and Insights	Customer	1.1.3		
14	Annual Committee Effectiveness Report	To present the annual effectiveness report for the Committee.		Rob Polkinghorne / Andy MacDonald	Operations / Customer	Operations	GD 8.5		
15	Uptake of Free School Meals in Secondary Schools	EODC 03/06/21 - to note that secondary school free school meals uptake is still below primary school level and instruct the Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to further investigate how to improve uptake in our secondary schools and report back to a future meeting of the committee		Derek McGowan / Neil Carnegie	Early Intervention and Community Empowerment	Operations	1.1.1		
16	Campus Model for School Provision	Council Budget 03/03/20 - To instruct the Chief Officer Corporate Landlord to take forward the proposals for a campus model for future school provision to the Education Operational Delivery Committee on 26 November 2020 EODC 17/03/21 - to note the comments from officers in respect of the school estate including that an update would be provided on Bucksburn later in the year, and in respect of the query from the Parent Forum about an update on Countesswells, to note that this would be included in the Community Campus report due to Committee in November	Service update was circulated in November 2020 advising that report would be presented November 2021	Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Resources	1.1.2		
17	Performance Management Framework Report – Education Operations	To present the latest performance for the cycle		Alex Paterson	Data and Insights	Customer	1.1.3		
18	Inspection Reporting	A standing item to report on the outcome of school inspections if required		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.6		
19	Cluster Risk Register - Education / Integrated Children's & Family Services	To report on the cluster risk register		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.4		

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Report Title	Minute Reference/Committee Decision or Purpose of Report	Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2									
20	26 January 2022								
21	ELC - Expansion of 1140 Hours	EOD Committee 20/01/2021 - to note that officers would be undertaking a review of the expansion to be concluded by December 2021 and to request that the evaluation be taken to Committee thereafter. Council Budget 11/03/21 - to instruct the Chief Education Officer to report to the first meeting of the Education Operational Delivery Committee in 2022 on the suitability of the provision of 1,140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare in the city		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
22	Gaelic Medium Education Catchment Areas	EODC 03/06/21 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to report back to the Committee on the outcomes of the consultation at its next available meeting following conclusion of the consultation process		Andrew Jones	Corporate Landlord	Resources	1.1.1 / 1.1.2		
23	Supporting Learners	EODC 03/06/21 - The Committee resolved to (a) note the approach being taken and progress made to date; and instruct the Programme Manager to report on the programme within 3 committee cycles; and (b) to note that officers would include an update on the work being done to promote the use of the Early Intervention Consultation option and the impact of this in the next report back to Committee.		Craig McDermott	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
24	Performance Management Framework Report – Education Operations	To present the latest performance for the cycle		Alex Paterson	Data and Insights	Customer	1.1.3		
25	Inspection Reporting	A standing item to report on the outcome of school inspections if required		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.6		
26	14 June 2022								
27	Free School Meals Annual Update	EOD Committee 19/04/18 - to instruct the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to bring a report to Committee prior to the close of each school year (a) detailing the numbers registered for and taking free school meals by school and (b) assessing the progress made by implementing the new workstreams and detailing any required adjustments for the following school year		Derek McGowan / Neil Carnegie	Early Intervention and Community Empowerment	Customer	1.1.1		

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Report Title	Minute Reference/Committee Decision or Purpose of Report	Update	Report Author	Chief Officer	Directorate	Terms of Reference	Delayed or Recommended for removal or transfer, enter either D, R, or T	Explanation if delayed, removed or transferred
2	Cluster Risk Register - Education / Integrated Children's & Family Services	To report on the cluster risk register		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.4		
38									
39	DATE TO BE CONFIRMED - DEPENDENT ON START DATE OF CONCESSION CONTRACTS								
40	ELC Concession Agreements	Strategic Commissioning Committee 15/04/21 - in relation to the Early Learning & Childcare Concession (Tillydrone and Northfield Cummings Park Nurseries) business case, instruct the Chief Officer - Education to review the operation of the concession agreements, 12 months from their commencement, and report the findings of that review to the Education Operational Delivery Committee		Eleanor Sheppard / Aisling MacQuarrie	Education	Operations	1.1.1		
41	2023								
42	Accessibility Plan	EOD Committee 17/09/20 - to instruct the Chief Education Officer to review the impact of the plan in three years' time		Eleanor Sheppard	Education	Operations	1.1.5		
43	Minimising Exclusion Policy	To present the revised exclusion policy for approval		Mhairi Shewan	Education	Operations	1.1.5		

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Performance Management Framework Report – Education Operations
REPORT NUMBER	CUS/21/213
DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Martin Murchie
REPORT AUTHOR	Alex Paterson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present Committee with the status of key performance measures relating to the Education Operational cluster.

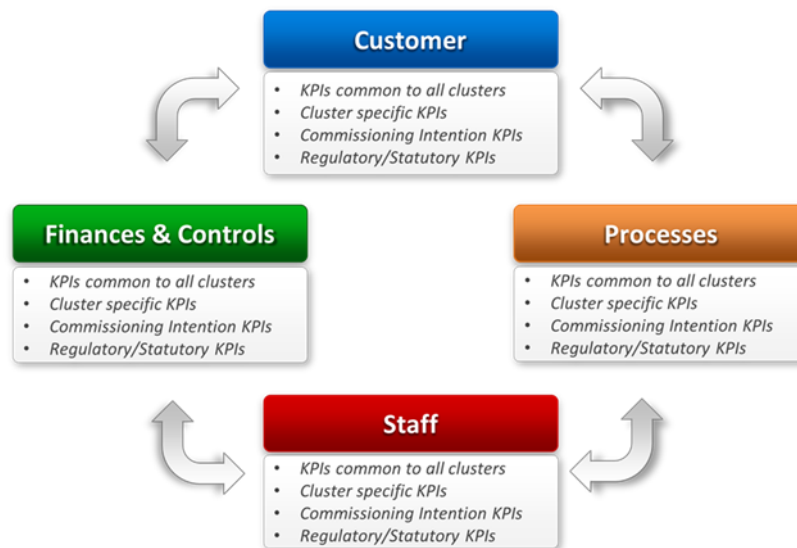
2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the performance information contained in the report Appendix.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report is to provide members with key performance measures in relation to the Education Operational cluster as expressed within the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Council Delivery Plan (the Plan).
- 3.2 Performance Management Framework Reporting against in-house delivery directly contributing to, or enabling delivery against, the City's Local Outcome Improvement Plan, (LOIP) has informed development of successive Council Delivery Plans, including the 2021/22 Plan that was agreed by Council on the 10th March 2021.
- 3.3 The 'Performance Management' section of the Plan explains how the commitments and deliverables contained in the LOIP will be supported and scrutinised through the Council's Performance Management Framework.
- 3.4 This *section* also reflects on the identification of Service Standards against each function/cluster, that builds on the original Framework which offers insight into the effectiveness, and accessibility of core service provision.
- 3.5 Where appropriate, data capture against these Standards is now directly incorporated within the suite of metrics contained within Appendix 1 and will be reported against on either a quarterly or annual basis depending on judgements around the level of risk, criticality and influence on Council Delivery Plan outputs and Local Outcome Improvement Plan objectives.





- 3.6 Whilst regular reflection on the entire suite of Standards within Performance Management Framework reporting was considered prudent during the course of 2020/21, an assessment of performance consistency over this period suggests that, going forwards, the above approach better serves to inform Members of potential risks around under-performance, and to scrutinise the responses of Services as the City moves through the on-going challenges posed by the impacts of COVID-19 and associated legislative changes.
- 3.7 The Framework provides for a structured approach within which performance will be reported to Committees. This presents performance data and analysis within four core perspectives, as shown below, which provides for uniformity of performance reporting across Committees.



- 3.8 Within the summary dashboard the following symbols are used:

Performance Measures

Traffic Light Icon

-  On target or within 5% of target/benchmarked outcome
-  Within 5% and 20% of target/benchmarked outcome and being monitored
-  Below 20% of target/benchmarked outcome and being actively pursued
-  Data only – target not appropriate/benchmarked outcome not available

4. 2020-21 EDUCATIONAL DATA LANDSCAPE

- 4.1 With recognition of the continued impact of COVID-19 in data availability at national levels across the 2020/21 academic year, (particularly around inspection activity), it is still not possible to offer full reflection on the suite of outcome related Education Service key performance indicators
- 4.2 At the same time, the Service has, where possible, sought to develop and incorporate additional or bespoke input/output measures which offer continued assurance around service delivery and performance.
- 4.3 Within the 2020/21 academic year, a national data focus had been placed on monitoring pupil attendance and absence levels, as a measure of both the effectiveness of Service management in dealing with COVID-19 restrictions and as a means of evaluating the levels of support for pupil health and well-being being delivered by Education Authorities,

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	None	N/A	N/A
Compliance	No significant related legal risks.	L	Publication of service performance information in the public domain ensures that the Council is meeting its legal obligations in the context of Best value reporting.
Operational	No significant related employee risks.	L	Oversight by Elected Members of core employee health and safety/attendance data supports the Council's obligations as an employer
Financial	No significant related financial risks.	L	Overview data on specific limited aspects of the cluster's financial performance is provided within this report
Reputational	Lack of sufficient access to	L	Placing of information in the public domain is contributed

	information for citizens		to by this report. Reporting of service performance serves to enhance the Council's reputation for transparency and accountability.
Environment / Climate	None		N/A

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>The provision of information on cluster performance supports scrutiny of progress against the delivery of the following Policy Statements:</p> <p>UNICEF Child Friendly accreditation</p> <p>Work with the Scottish Government to provide flexible and affordable childcare for working families on the lowest incomes</p> <p>Support the implementation of Developing the Young Workforce, seek to gain the highest level of investors in young people accreditation and ensure there is a focus on supporting pupils excel in STEM subjects</p> <p>Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners in the city.</p>
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	<p>The information within this report supports the delivery of Stretch Outcomes 2 and 3 in the LOIP through the following projects:</p> <p>Support 15 care experienced young people to progress to employment through public sector funded employability programmes by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of people within Aberdeen City gaining qualifications in ICT and Digital skills at SCQF Levels 7 and above by 10% by 2023</p>
<p>400 unemployed Aberdeen City residents supported into Fair Work by 2026</p> <p>500 Aberdeen City residents upskilled/ reskilled to enable them to move into, within and between economic opportunities as they arise by 2026</p>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The detail within this report supports the delivery of Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes 4 to 9 in the refreshed LOIP. This includes the following projects:</p> <p>Reduce the number of children starting P1 with an identified speech delay by 5% by 2023.</p>
<p>95% of children (0-5years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026.</p>	

<p>90% of children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026.</p> <p>As corporate parents we will ensure that 95% of care experienced children will have the same levels of educational attainment, health and emotional wellbeing and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</p> <p>95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination by 2026</p> <p>Child Friendly City where all decisions which impact on them are informed by them by 2026.</p> <p>30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.</p>	<p>Increase to 80%, the number of staff who feel confident about how to directly support, or refer a child for support, and signpost to appropriate services by 2022.</p> <p>100% of schools offer sustainable and equitable access to counselling for those children aged 10 and above who require it by 2022.</p> <p>100% of children and young people have free access to physical activity which improves mental health and wellbeing by 2022.</p> <p>Increase the number of care experienced young people accessing a positive and sustained destination by 25% by 2022.</p> <p>Increase the number of accredited courses directly associated with growth areas by 7% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of vulnerable learners entering a positive and sustained destination by 7% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of young people who leave school with a minimum of SVQ 3 in literacy and numeracy and 4 other qualifications to 93% by 2023.</p> <p>Achieve UNICEF badges in: - Leadership - Culture - Communication - Place - Child Friendly Services – Participating</p> <p>Increase to 100% of staff working directly and indirectly with children who have received child friendly city training by 2023.</p> <p>Increase number of young people who need support in relation to trauma and bereavement having access to such support by 50% by 2023.</p>
<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p> <p>Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.</p> <p>Addressing the nature crisis by protecting/managing 26% of Aberdeen’s area for nature by 2026.</p>	<p>The data in this report reflects contributory impacts on LOIP Stretch Outcomes 14 and 15</p> <p>Respectively, this contributes to delivery of the following improvement projects:</p> <p>Increase % of people who walk as one mode of travel by 10% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase % of people who cycle as one mode of travel by 2% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase community food growing in schools, communities and workplaces by 12 by 2023</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>The report reflects outcomes aligned to the City’s National Improvement Framework for education and</p>

	outputs related to the City's involvement in the Northern Alliance collaborative.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	<p>The report reflects legislative outcomes aligned to the Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 as amended, the Education (Scotland) (Act) 2016, Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended (and associated Code of Practice) Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The report primarily reflects policy outcomes aligned to the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework and Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programmes</p>

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Delivery Plan 2021/2022 - COM/21/054
Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026 (July 2021 Refresh)

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Performance Summary Dashboard


11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Appendix A - Performance Management Framework Report – Education Operations

1. Customer

Cluster Level Measures – 2020-21 Annual Local Indicators

Performance Indicator	Current Status	2020/21 Target
Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare settings achieving an average evaluation of 'Good or better' against inspection themes as a result of Care Inspectorate evaluations of COVID-19 management arrangements (by academic year)		100%

Service Analysis

Formal Inspection Outcomes

Due to COVID-19 provisions, limited routine inspections of either Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings or schools-based provision had been undertaken by the Care Inspectorate or Education Scotland over the previous academic year, and implementation of the National Standards for Early Learning and Childcare was suspended by the Scottish Government. In place of routine evaluations, a more limited risk-based schedule of inspections of COVID-19 mitigations in place within ELC settings was introduced as services transitioned through the various phases of COVID restrictions*








A number of these inspection outcomes have been recently published from this more limited and focused activity, derived from three unannounced or short notice inspections by the Care Inspectorate, of Aberdeen City Council managed Early Learning and Childcare settings, with each of the 15 areas of indicator evaluation, attaining a grade of 4 or greater (Good or better). This bespoke Indicator links directly to the original 2020-21 Service Standard 'All Early Learning and Childcare settings will meet the National Standard'

The outcomes for Care Inspectorate visits of funded partner provision across the 2020/21 academic year, including a further five settings, were marginally lower with 12 of the 15 Indicator evaluations (80%) resulting in gradings of 4 (Good) or above but with all achieving a grade of 3 or more (Adequate or above)

*The scope of inspections covering the theme 'How good is our care and support during the COVID-19 pandemic' encompassed three Indicator evaluations covering the management of Children's Health and Wellbeing, Infection Control and Prevention and Staffing Arrangements.

Source: Care Inspectorate Inspection Reports

Cluster Level Measures – 2021-22 Local Indicators

Performance Measure	2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 2020/21	Quarter 1 2021/22	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly	2020/21 Target
	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value			
Total No. complaints received (stage 1 and 2) – Education	64	13	26	17	30			
% of complaints resolved within timescale stage 1 and 2) – Education	71.9%	25.0%	92.4%	94.1%	86.7%			75%*
% of complaints with at least one point upheld (stage 1 and 2) – Education	39.1%	53.8%	34.6%	41.2%	16.7%			
Total No. of lessons learnt identified (stage 1 and 2) – Education**	8	0	5	1	13			

Service Analysis

Complaints Handling



Drill-down data for Quarter 1 indicates that, although reduced on the previous quarter, the Service was meeting the corporate complaint resolution target of 75% and exceeding the performance of the majority of services.

The number of complaints received were significantly increased in relation to the same period in 2020-21(at commencement of the first COVID shutdown) but were lower than the 32 recorded in Quarter 1 of 2019-20. The proportion of Complaints that were upheld, either in part or as a whole, was amongst the lowest of the monitored services and almost half the corporate figure of 31.2%.

Source: ACC Complaints Handling Team

1. Processes

Cluster Level Measures – 2020-21 Annual Local Indicator

Performance Measure	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Status	Long Trend	2020/21Target
	Value	Value	Value			
Early Years Provision- % of eligible population allocated ACC funded Early Learning and Childcare places in local authority and partner provider settings	93.76%	94.25%	95.91%			98.0%

Service Analysis

Percentage of eligible population allocated Early Learning and Childcare places

The combined percentage of registered and funded allocations against eligible 3 and 4 year-old populations rose by a statistically significant margin from 94.25% in the previous year to 95.91%, representing the greatest proportion of eligible population placed in the current measure's seven year timeline (changes to the calculation process were introduced in 2014-15)





The total number of places offered was 4,176 against an eligible population of 4,354 children. Both of these figures represent a decrease from 2019/20 levels, with the eligible population reducing at a marginally faster rate than places offered, which has had a limited contribution to the variation in the percentage of children placed, although the improvement trend is unaffected.

This improvement can be attributed, in part, to the increase in number of childminders who have now entered into partnership with Aberdeen City Council to become Funded Providers. 50% of childminders in Aberdeen are now Funded Providers offering more choice and flexibility for families in the city.

Secondary to this supply enhancement, there has been improvements in the promotion of entitlement, application processes and the wider flexibility around meeting placing requests, which have mitigated the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and the national delay in full implementation of the increased statutory Early Learning and Childcare entitlement.

Source: ACC Early Years Team

Cluster Level Measures – National COVID-19 Performance Indicators - Childcare Services Provision*

Performance Measure	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	Status	Monthly Long Trend	National Figure
	Value	Value	Value	Value			
% of Local Authority childcare services open	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%			96.0%
% of total childcare services open	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	94.0%			92.0%

Service Analysis

Childcare Settings

As at the end of July 2021, Aberdeen City sat within in the upper quartile of Local Authorities for the proportion of directly managed/funded childcare settings which are open (i.e., accepting placements up to their full present capacity) with a now consistent statistical trend of 98%

The proportion of Total Day Care of Children provision within the community (including childminding, private and no-profit provision) which was open, reduced marginally at the end of July, although it remains above the national figure. In turn, the Aberdeen figures reflected that 86% of childminding settings were open, 94% of private day care settings were available, as were 84% of voluntary/not for profit settings. Each of these figures represent stable outcomes in comparison with data reported to Committee in June 2021 and are in line with national averages.

It is worth noting that day care of children delivery models differ in each local authority and can materially influence the overall outcomes, so some caution requires to be exercised when comparing even 'nearest-neighbour' authorities through these datasets.

*These rounded figures relate to childcare settings at month end snapshot points which are benchmarked with both the national outcomes and those of other Scottish local authorities.

Source: Scottish Government Education Analytical Services. The most recent data covers the period up to 25th June 2021

Cluster Level Measures – 2020/21 National COVID-19 Performance Indicators - Pupil Attendance/Absence Metrics

Chart 1a Urban Local Authority and Scotland Comparisons of Average Pupil Attendance Timeline – Summer 2020

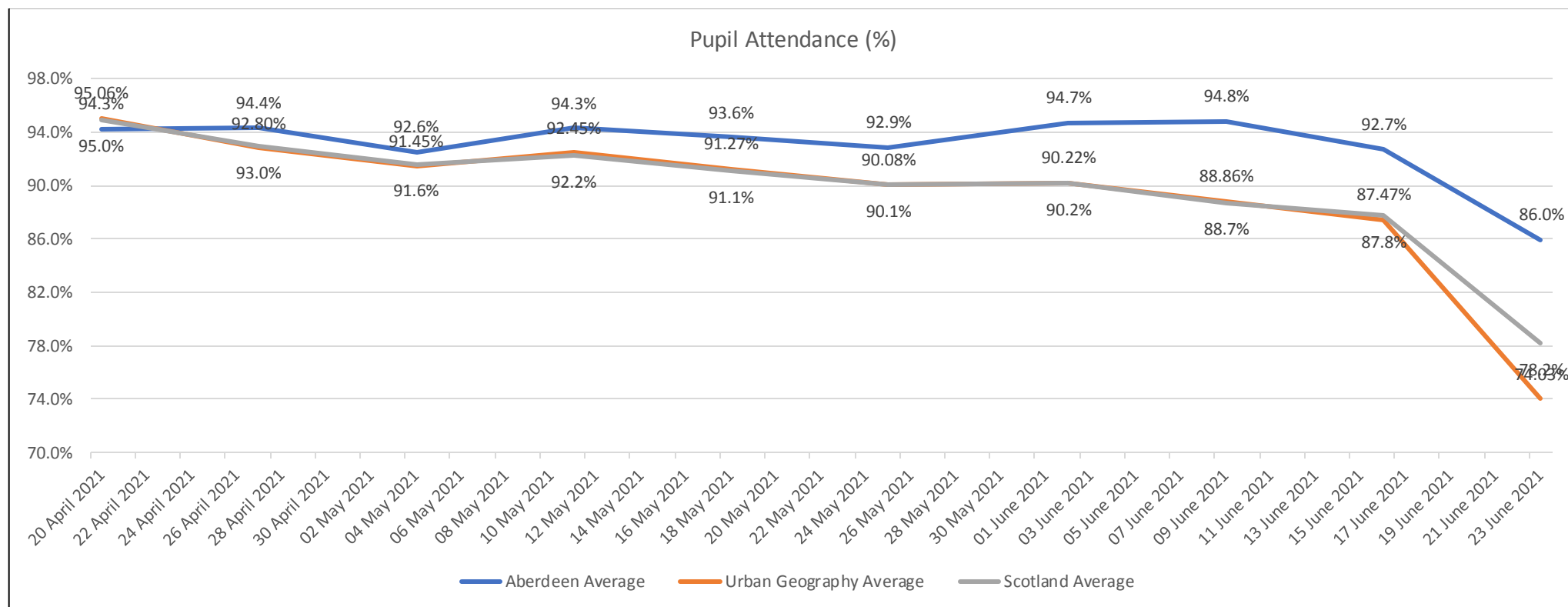
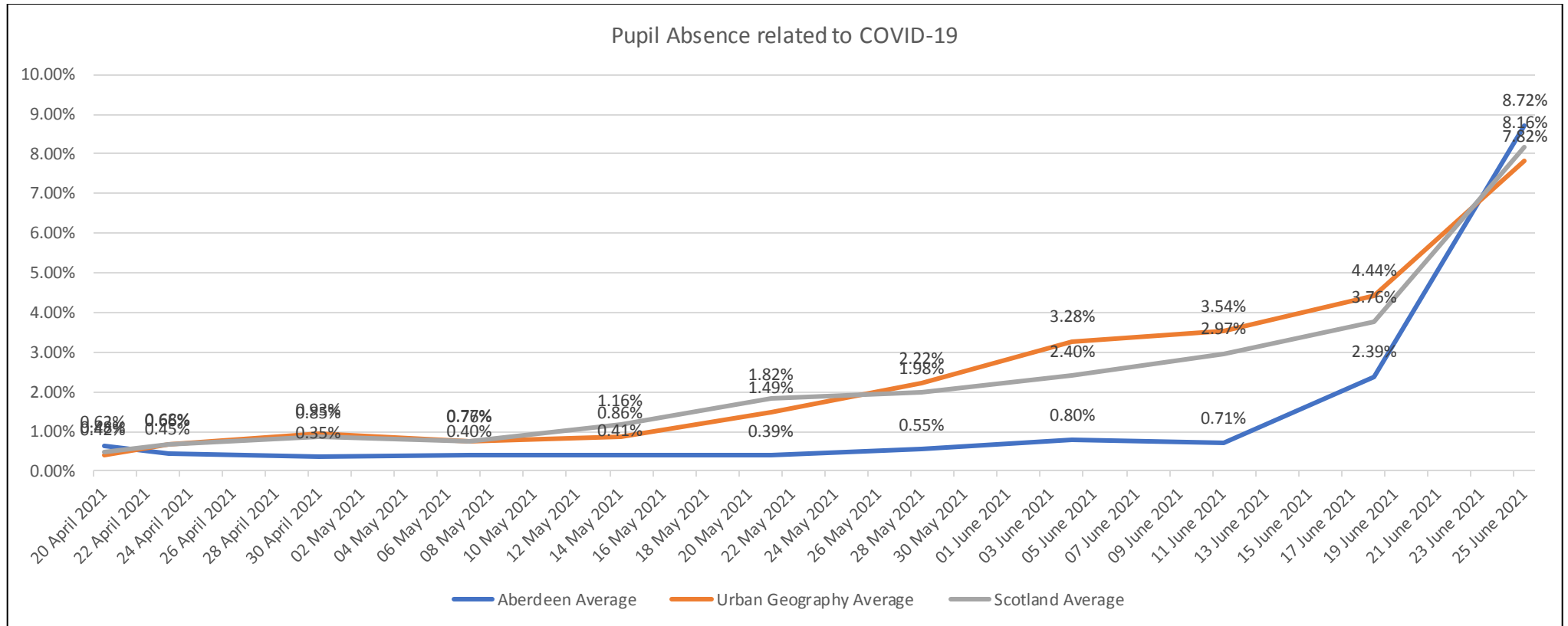


Chart 1b. Urban Local Authority and Scotland Comparisons of COVID -19 related Average Pupil Absences – Summer 2020

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Cluster Level Measures – 2020/21 National COVID-19 Performance Indicators – Self-Isolation Metrics

Table 1 % of pupils who self-isolated during the 2020/21 school year (when schools were fully open to all primary and/or secondary school pupils)

Total of days absence	Aberdeen City	Dundee City	East Dunbarton	City of Edinburgh	Falkirk	Glasgow City	North Lanarkshire	Renfrewshire	West Dunbartonshire	Urban Geography Average	Scotland
No half days	72%	53%	47%	58%	52%	44%	52%	49%	48%	59%	58%
A total of at least one half day	28%	47%	72%	42%	48%	56%	48%	51%	52%	53%	42%
A total of at least one week	11%	26%	29%	15%	22%	37%	27%	29%	30%	28%	21%
A total of at least two weeks	2%	8%	9%	3%	6%	16%	8%	9%	9%	9%	6%

Service Analysis

National COVID-19 School Pupil Attendance, Absence and Self-Isolation Metrics

The national Education Analytics service suspended the National COVID-19 School Attendance and Absence submissions and dashboard at the conclusion of the Winter term but maintained an overview of attendances with a more limited scope/data time series after Easter. In terms of benchmarking detailed like-for-like provision, this monitoring re-started in full as of 20th April and is reflected in Charts 1a and b above, which captures the comparative attendance and COVID-19 related absence levels up to June 25th 2021

Aberdeen City Council, when compared to its Urban Geography Family Group and Scotland Averages, had performed consistently well in terms of maintaining pupil Attendance levels and minimising COVID-related Absences over the course of the Summer Term. Although City Attendance Levels, in common with both benchmarks, experienced a fall in Attendance towards the end of Term, (driven by an increase in the scale and instances of Self-Isolation of pupils) this also saw a positive widening of the gap to our benchmark authorities.

Collation of Self-Isolation data on a national basis, in contrast, was gathered consistently across all local authorities throughout the entirety of the 2020/21 academic term. This information, with granularity around the impact of Self-Isolation on absences, and pupils ability to physically attend school, is captured in Table 1.

An evaluation of the impact and extent of Self-Isolation among school pupils, suggests that the City was among the least affected local authorities in terms of the proportion of pupils who were required to self-isolate, and that the level of absences related to self-isolation were more limited than the majority of Education Authorities. These outcomes likely have a strong correlation with the extent of community infection but cannot explain the entirety of these differences,



This suggests that schools management of pupil's health and wellbeing, infection and isolation control measures and support of parents/guardians to encourage attendance where practical, through effective communications and the on-line curriculum, has also been a significant influence on mitigating the 'loss' of in-class learning associated with instances of self-isolation.

It's important to note that prevention from physical attendance due to self-isolation does not equate to an Absence from Education, as each LA had differing models of remote learning access and methodologies for recording Absences from Education, As noted in the previous report to June Committee, the numbers of pupils self-isolating who were unable to undertake learning has been very low in comparison with the full pupil cohort.

Source: Scottish Government Education Analytical Services

3. Staff

Cluster Level Measures – 2021-22 Local Indicators

Performance Measure	Quarter 2 2020-21	Quarter 3 2020-21	Quarter 4 2020-21	Quarter 1 2021-22	Status	Long Trend - Monthly
	Value	Value	Value	Value		
Establishment actual FTE – Education	2,841.26	2,867.32	2,865.41	2,886.57		

Service Analysis

Establishment FTE

Through support provided by the Scottish Government against the national Education Recovery Plan, the Council was enabled to recruit and appoint 39.28 (FTE) teaching positions over the course of the 2020/21 financial year. Additional funding of £1.65m has since been outlined for distribution to Aberdeen City Council as part of the second tranche of Recovery Funding of £50m, which facilitates in principle recruitment against an additional 33 (FTE) teaching posts and 17 (FTE) pupil support assistant roles.

Source: ACC Finance Team

Performance Measure	2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 2020/21	Quarter 1 2021/22	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly
	Annual Baseline Value	Value	Value	Value	Value		
H&S Employee Reportable by Cluster – Education	0	0	0	0	1		
H&S Employee Non-Reportable by Cluster – Education	153	53	68	32	64		

Service Analysis

Health and Safety Incidents

Quarter 1 data reflects a single Reportable Incident and an increase in the number of Non-reportable Incidents from the previous Quarter. The same period in 2020/21, when schools were largely operating under remote teaching conditions, recorded no Reportable or Non-Reportable incidents while Quarter 1 in 2019/20 saw 2 Reportable Incidents and 108 Non-reportable incidents.

Source: ACC Health and Safety Power BI Dashboard

Performance Measure	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 2020/21	Quarter 1 2021/22	Status	Long Trend - Quarterly	Corporate Figure
	Value	Value	Value	Value			
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Education (12 month rolling figure at quarter end)	3.63	3.69	3.81	4.29			4.72
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Primary and Secondary Schools (12 month rolling figure at quarter end)	3.63	3.61	3.69	4.17			4.72
Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE – Early Learning and Childcare (12 month rolling figure at quarter end)	3.59	4.14	4.74	5.18			4.72

Service Analysis

Employee Absence Levels

As at the end of June 2021, the Education Service, as a whole, recorded an average of 4.29 days sickness absence per FTE, which was below the Council level figure of 4.72 for the same period. Education absence has been consistently below the corporate level since the new 12 month rolling period measure was introduced (March 2021).

The quarterly absence trends against each of the measures closely follow that being recorded at a corporate level, with Primary and Secondary Schools sitting just below the Service level figure. Levels of absence in Early Learning and Childcare are slightly above the corporate figure, although still significantly lower than a majority of front-facing services at Quarter 1 and is in line with those of 'administrative- based' Clusters.

Source: ACC Power BI Attendance Dashboard

4. Finance & Controls

Cluster Level Measures – 2020-21 Local Indicators

Performance Indicator	Quarter 1 2021/22		Quarter 2 2021/22		Quarter 3 21/22		Quarter 4 2021/22	
	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status	Value	Status
Staff Expenditure – % spend to full year budget profile – Education*	24.76%							

PI Status		Long Term Trends		Short Term Trends	
	Alert (figure more than 20% out with target)		Improving/Increasing		Improving/Increasing
	Warning (figure between 5% and 19% out with target)		No or Limited Change		No or Limited Change
	OK (figure within target or better)		Getting Worse/Decreasing		Getting Worse/Decreasing
	Unknown				
	Data Only				

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Education Improvement Journey Tracker 2019/20 and National Improvement Framework Plan 2021/22
REPORT NUMBER	CUS.21.212
DIRECTOR	Andy Macdonald and Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Martin Murchie and Eleanor Sheppar
REPORT AUTHOR	Reyna Stewart and Gael Simpson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Elected Members information on (a) data from the 2020 SQA exam diet (post review) derived from the final data release through Insight, the Education Service Self Evaluation process and initial 2021 SQA outcomes and (b) seek approval to implement the refreshed Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan for 2021/22 following submission of the Plan and Self-Evaluation to the Scottish Government.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 notes the content of Appendix A, outlining the post review outcomes from the 2019/2020 Senior Phase, released through the Insight Tool, the Service's 2020 2021 Self Evaluation Report (Appendix B) and initial pre-review outcomes Available from the 2020/2021 SQA examination diet (Appendix D);
- 2.2 instructs the Chief Education Officer to submit the Self Evaluation Report and the Aberdeen Council National Improvement Framework Plan 2021/2022 (the Plan) to the Scottish Government as soon as reasonably practicable;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Education Officer to implement the proposed Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan for 2021/22 (Appendix C); and
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Education Officer to maintain a review of the content of the 2021/22 Plan in light of any impacting national legislative and policy provisions such as the Scottish Government response to the OECD report, and advise Committee of any required changes in due course.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Currently Available Education Data

- 3.1.1 Education data is released at various points over a school year and through several agencies which requires consideration of each data release separately, and in concert with each other. The most comprehensive picture of attainment, aligning directly with the National Improvement Framework model, is available through the Insight data release to local authorities at the end of September/early October every year. At the point of report completion, the full Insight release for 2020/2021 had yet to be published.
- 3.1.2 This nationally benchmarked Insight data set, along with other data parameters that inform the Council's Education Improvement Journey reporting, brings together the achievements of young people from the full range of awarding bodies providing a holistic picture of performance. This extended picture is invaluable in supporting service self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- 3.1.3 Due to the full data set for 2020/21 being unavailable at this point in time, early Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) data from the August 2021 release is not included in the Appendix A template but will be captured in the 2020/21 Education Improvement Journey report following the release and analysis of this further data.
- 3.1.4 The release of this additional Insight data each year triggers an informal review of the improvement priorities of the Service to ensure that the currently active National Improvement Framework Plan remains appropriate to help drive improvement.
- 3.1.5 The abbreviated pre-review SQA data from 2020/21 which is currently accessible, is however very positive (with a narrow overview of improvement from current data being provided in Appendix D). This information was considered at the Council meeting of 23rd August 2021 as part of the Best Value Assurance Report. Wider reflection on the outcomes from Broad General Education and the Senior Phase, encompassing these SQA outcomes, will be presented in detail through the Education Improvement Journey Report to this Committee in November.

3.2 Insight data 2019/20.

- 3.2.1 As Members will know, the methodology used to determine SQA awards in 2020 was changed in response to queries around the validity of the algorithm being used and estimated grades were subsequently awarded. As a result, the Insight based data for 2019/2020, with limited exceptions, is not directly comparable with that of previous years.
- 3.2.2 On this basis, whilst comparative data from prior years is retained to maintain the integrity of reporting, a focus has been placed on comparing in-year City outcomes with those at a national level and against the Virtual Comparator for 2019/2020.
- 3.2.3 Appendix A outlines the 'standardised' National Benchmark Measure outcomes from the 2020 examination diet covering the post review datasets which have

been latterly published through Insight, retaining as much granularity as is possible to provide from this publication.

- 3.2.4 Members will recall that initial outcomes from the Senior Phase were offered in the report to November 2020. This Insight data offers post-review data which supports the observations from this earlier report.

3.3 Key 2019/20 Insight Summary (Appendix A)

Literacy and Numeracy

- 3.3.1 Literacy and Numeracy attainment at Levels 4 and 5, showed an increase in the proportion of pupil candidates achieving these levels, particularly at Level 5.
- 3.3.2 At both Levels, this was accompanied by a rise in the Virtual Comparator value that could indicate that the City's position relative to this benchmark is either unchanged or marginally improved, but with some closing to the National level.

Attainment for All

- 3.3.3 Year-on-year gains in Average Complementary Tariff Points are evident across both the Middle 60% and Highest 20% of pupil candidates with the latter recording the greater increase and representing the more statistically relevant change.
- 3.3.4 The rate of improvement in the Middle 60% of pupil candidates is less significant than those in the Highest 20% and would be judged as being statistically less significant than the latter, There is a similar movement stasis experienced by the Lower 20% which, although marginally declining in step with both the Virtual Comparator and National Figure, has fallen at a slower rate than either benchmark.

Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD Quintile

- 3.3.5 The most significant gains were made by young people in SIMD 1 and 3 at Level 4 although it should be noted that both cohorts are slightly smaller than those of last year. Performance was maintained in other Quintiles.
- 3.3.6 In relation with the Virtual Comparator, outcomes across each Quintile were below that recorded for the Comparator except for Quintile 3, but with an accelerated closing of the SIMD attainment gap being noticeable particularly at Quintiles 1 and 3.
- 3.3.7 At Level 5, some gains are evident across all Quintiles and whilst there is a shortfall against the Virtual Comparator for most Quintiles, there is, again, evidence of the attainment gap narrowing.
- 3.3.8 Although the number of pupils presented at Level 6 preclude detailed SIMD

based comparison, the outcomes for both SIMD 1 and 2 Quintiles exceeded or matched the Virtual Comparator figure.

Attainment by SIMD Quintile

- 3.3.9 Across each Quintile and by Attainment Cohort (Lowest 20%, Middle 60%, Highest 20%, there has been almost universal levels of improvement.
- 3.3.10 Whilst the greatest absolute increases in Average Complementary Tariff Points are generally recorded in the Highest 20% Cohort, Quintiles 1 and 3 generally, saw the largest proportional Tariff increases across the three cohorts.
- 3.3.11 Consequently, there is statistically significant narrowing of the attainment gap to SIMD 5 outcomes against both Quintiles with a lesser impact being recorded against the attainment gap at Quintiles 2 and 4. This pattern of reducing attainment gap between the Most and Least Deprived Pupil candidates is also noted to an extent within the national breadth and depth measures from the leavers data release, although this falls out with the National Benchmark Measures template.
- 3.3.12 Additional detailed analysis of this latter data has been led by the Analytics and Insight team and been combined with Insight data to offer a wider appreciation of pupil progress to the Service

Positive Destinations by SIMD Quintile

- 3.3.13 All Quintiles have been impacted by the downturn in the local economy although it is evident that those living in areas related to the lower SIMD Quintiles have been most impacted.
- 3.3.14 This is understood to be related to the traditional direct movement from formal education into employment that is more prevalent among leavers from SIMD 1 and 2 areas.
- 3.3.15 The Education Service continues to work with colleagues in the Economic Development Employability team, and partners such as Skills Development Scotland and the Developing the Young Workforce Board to support our young people into a positive and sustained destination.

Positive Destinations

- 3.3.16 The three-year downturn in the local economy which had been seeing signs of reversing in 2019, was exacerbated significantly by COVID-19 and materially impacted city school leavers last year with almost 4% less securing an initial positive destination, with the lower number of school leavers and proportion of leavers whose destination was Unknown also having a lesser influence.
- 3.3.17 The significant loss of employment opportunities, has resulted in an increase in those in the Unemployed and Seeking and in the Unemployed and Not

Seeking categories. There is also evidence that some of the training opportunities young people had secured were unable to progress as planned due to restrictions on businesses activity levels and furloughed staff being unable to support trainees.

- 3.3.18 The number and proportion of young people securing a Higher Education placement has significantly increased but there is a slight reduction in those attending Further Education.
- 3.3.19 The Service continues to work closely with colleges to ensure that the local offer meets the needs of our young people, and is working on a number of initiatives to address the destinations issue, including the recent launch of the Council's ABZ works site and an associated 'Lift Off' event. The Service also continues to work closely with a range of partners to provide personalised support to all young people in the senior phase to help ensure a positive and sustained destination on leaving school.
- 3.3.20 The Senior Phase report being considered at this meeting of Committee provides a detailed summary of actions aligned with this collaborative model, which supports, and calls upon the expertise provided through, the City's LOIP based delivery vehicles, including support of the Developing the Young Workforce agenda.

Care Experienced Children and Young People

- 3.3.21 There is a particularly small cohort of Care Experienced Young People captured within the 2019/20 Insight dataset (fewer than 16 individuals in some cohorts), which is smaller than in most previous years, and as limited information, due to data suppression, is captured in Appendix A, considerable care requires to be exercised around extrapolating data trends or deriving intelligence from this information.
- 3.3.22 Given this, the attainment of Care Experienced Young People, and any variations in attainment, are most effectively measured through individual longitudinal assessment and support which Schools and the Virtual School Head Teacher provide on a personalised planning basis.

3.4 Broad General Education Data Landscape 2020

- 3.4.1 Pupil assessments, over the course of 2020, along with data collation and submissions by local education authorities around the Achievement of Curriculum Excellence (ACEL) were suspended by the Scottish Government in response to the initial, and later, phases of the COVID-19 emergency.
- 3.4.2 These assessments re-commenced over Summer Term 2021 and are pending evaluation by the Scottish Government, which will further inform the Service's National Improvement Framework and offer extended tracking data.
- 3.4.3 At the same time, the Scottish Government advised on the 12th May 2021 that, in response to representations made by its professional associations,

these data submission requirements will not be extended to Senior 3 pupils but that teachers should continue to gather evidence of all children and young people's progress.

3.5 Education Service Self Evaluation Summary

3.5.1 Whilst scrutiny of the data above has contributed, in part, to the Self-Evaluation (Appendix B in this report and Appendix A to the Plan submission) and design of the Council's National Improvement Framework, there is clear recognition that the pandemic has changed the lives of all children, young people, and families across Aberdeen City forever, and beyond the limitations of interpretation of attainment qualifications data.

3.5.2 Given the gravity of our collective experience and the changed outlook for the city and the city's children and families, the Self-Evaluation 2020/2021 extends more widely than a review of the impact of the original National Improvement Framework Plan and:

- takes stock of progress made over the last 3 years;
- reflects on how the service adapted to face the demands of the pandemic and;
- begins to consider areas that require continued acceleration or further improvement activity to 'build back better'.
- The indicative outcomes from SQA data released in August 2021.

3.6 Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan Summary

3.6.1 The Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan is a statutory submission to the Scottish Government that requires to be provided by the end of September each year, which brings together improvement planning against a variety of education themes and Standards in Schools etc. 2000 legislation.

3.6.2 The Plan is aligned with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plans which, through School Improvement Planning, and in concert with ASG partners, assists delivery of the Council's improvement objectives/stretch aims around children's education and well-being at establishment level.

3.6.3 Additionally, it reflects our wider collaborative approach with Community Planning Partners which, as was reported to Council on 26th August 2021, was commended as part of the Council's 2021 Best Value Audit, and will continue to be built upon.

3.6.4 Staff from across the Education Service have come together to agree key priorities for improvement in session 2021/22. The Self-Evaluation Report in Appendix B identifies a number of areas for improvement over the next 12 months which have been highlighted because of this collaborative approach and are incorporated within the Plan.

3.6.5 Resultantly, the Education Service will address a number of crosscutting service improvements including:

- build on the use of live data to diagnose, communicate, and address vulnerability in an agile way.
- continue to improve the use of improvement science and collate all planned improvement activity into one plan to improve live monitoring arrangements.
- further strengthen relationships across the Community Planning Partnership and work in partnership with them to address vulnerabilities identified in this Plan.
- be future focused and work with Community Planning Partners to explore Community Campus models and new educational ways of working.
- work across the Community Planning Partnership to reshape wider children's services to address the changing needs of children, families, and community in keeping with the national review of Additional Support Needs in education.

3.6.4 Details of how the Service intends to address these, and align with key priorities within the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework, are included in the City's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan for 2021/22. A substantial number of these developments will be undertaken in collaboration with, and the critical input of, Community Planning Partners.

3.6.5 Each proposed Action within the Plan will be driven and coordinated by Improvement Groups comprising school and central staff with progress being monitored monthly by both the central leadership team and head teachers to enable teams to hold each other to account. A comprehensive suite of trend data will provide the Education Service with real time data to monitor improvement in real time.

3.7 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) on Curriculum for Excellence Summary

3.7.1 As noted within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) on Curriculum for Excellence report being considered at this meeting, the Scottish Government's response to this assessment has been met with agreement against the 12 recommendations arising from the OECD evaluation although detailed next steps will follow in 6 months.

3.7.2 As the Scottish Government's policy response/implementation plan against the OECD document becomes clear, the Service will review the content of the NIF Plan for alignment with this response, particularly in respect of those areas of policy which are directed by, or through national agencies and structures, where local authorities lack discretionary influence over the modelling, delivery and resourcing of activity.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The costs of all improvement actions will be undertaken within existing budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 requires that, as the Education Authority, Aberdeen City Council has a duty to:

- Enhance equity and promote a reduction in inequalities of educational outcome experienced by pupils because of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education with a view to achieving the strategic priorities of the NIF.
- Undertake annual planning and reporting and annual school improvement planning to address the four priorities of the NIF.
- Ensure strategic decisions are taken with due regard as to how they will address, or help to address, the disparity of educational outcomes which exist between the most and least disadvantaged and at the same time raise attainment for all.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	Risk of not achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.	L	Changes to our provision and service delivery will enable primary prevention and early intervention thereby reducing potential risk.
Compliance	Non-compliance with legislation, financial claims, and legal challenge (tribunals).	M	Mitigated by services being realigned to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City and prevent escalation of need.
Operational	Staff are overwhelmed, which leads to low morale as staff feel unable to meet the educational and well-being needs of young people.	L	Mitigated by widespread staff engagement on draft NIF production and offering high quality professional learning for staff to ensure that they meet their statutory duties under the relevant Acts.
Financial	Risk of not having sufficient resource.	M	Mitigated by realigning service delivery and resource through the NIF to

			better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City.
Reputational	Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners.	L	Data scrutiny and reporting enhance the Council's reputation for transparency and accountability.
Environment / Climate	Risk of lack of awareness of environmental/climate issues.	L	Mitigated by breadth and scope of Curriculum for Excellence.

7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>The provision of information on pupil performance and the NIF Plan supports scrutiny of progress against the delivery of the following Policy Statements:</p> <p>2 - UNICEF Child Friendly accreditation</p> <p>3 - Work with the Scottish Government to provide flexible and affordable childcare for working families on the lowest incomes.</p> <p>4 - Support the implementation of Developing the Young Workforce, seek to gain the highest level of investors in young people accreditation and ensure there is a focus on supporting pupils excel in STEM subjects.</p> <p>7 - Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners in the city.</p>
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
<p>Prosperous Economy</p> <p>400 unemployed Aberdeen City residents supported into Fair Work by 2026</p> <p>500 Aberdeen City residents upskilled/ reskilled to enable them to move into, within and between economic opportunities as they arise by 2026</p>	<p>The information within this report supports the delivery of Stretch Outcomes 2 and 3 in the LOIP through the following projects:</p> <p>Support 15 care experienced young people progress to employment through public sector funded employability programmes by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of people within Aberdeen City gaining qualifications in ICT and Digital skills at SCQF Levels 7 and above by 10% by 2023</p>

<p>Prosperous People</p> <p>95% of children (0-5years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026.</p> <p>90% of children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026.</p> <p>As corporate parents we will ensure that 95% of care experienced children will have the same levels of educational attainment, health and emotional wellbeing and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</p> <p>95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination by 2026</p> <p>Child Friendly City where all decisions which impact on them are informed by them by 2026.</p> <p>30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.</p>	<p>The detail within this report supports the delivery of Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes 4 to 9 in the refreshed LOIP. This includes the following projects:</p> <p>Reduce the number of children starting P1 with an identified speech delay by 5% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase to 80%, the number of staff who feel confident about how to directly support, or refer a child for support, and signpost to appropriate services by 2022.</p> <p>100% of schools offer sustainable and equitable access to counselling for those children aged 10 and above who require it by 2022.</p> <p>100% of children and young people have free access to physical activity which improves mental health and wellbeing by 2022.</p> <p>Increase the number of care experienced young people accessing a positive and sustained destination by 25% by 2022.</p> <p>Increase the number of accredited courses directly associated with growth areas by 7% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of vulnerable learners entering a positive and sustained destination by 7% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase the number of young people who leave school with a minimum of SVQ 3 in literacy and numeracy and 4 other qualifications to 93% by 2023.</p> <p>Achieve UNICEF badges in: - Leadership - Culture - Communication - Place - Child Friendly Services – Participating</p> <p>Increase to 100% of staff working directly and indirectly with children who have received child friendly city training by 2023.</p>
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	Increase number of young people who need support in relation to trauma and bereavement having access to such support by 50% by 2023.
<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p> <p>Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.</p> <p>Addressing the nature crisis by protecting/managing 26% of Aberdeen's area for nature by 2026.</p>	<p>The data in this report reflects contributory impacts on LOIP Stretch Outcomes 14 and 15</p> <p>Respectively, this informs delivery of the following improvement projects:</p> <p>Increase % of people who walk (to school/nursery) as one mode of travel by 10% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase % of people who cycle (to school/nursery) as one mode of travel by 2% by 2023.</p> <p>Increase community food growing in schools, communities, and workplaces by 12 by 2023</p>
Regional and City Strategies	The report reflects outcomes aligned to the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework for education.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	The report reflects outcomes aligned to the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework, The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 as amended, the Education (Scotland) (Act) 2016, Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended (and associated Code of Practice) Equality Act 2010.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	The recommendations arising from this report do not require a full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment to be completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

OPE.20.222 Senior Phase, Education Operational Delivery Committee, 26th November 2020

Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan 2020/21

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A Insight Achievement and Attainment Data 2019/20
Appendix B Aberdeen City Council Education Service Evaluation Report, 2021
Appendix C Aberdeen City National Improvement Framework Plan 2021-22
Appendix D Initial 2021 SQA Exam Diet Extract - August 2021

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National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy

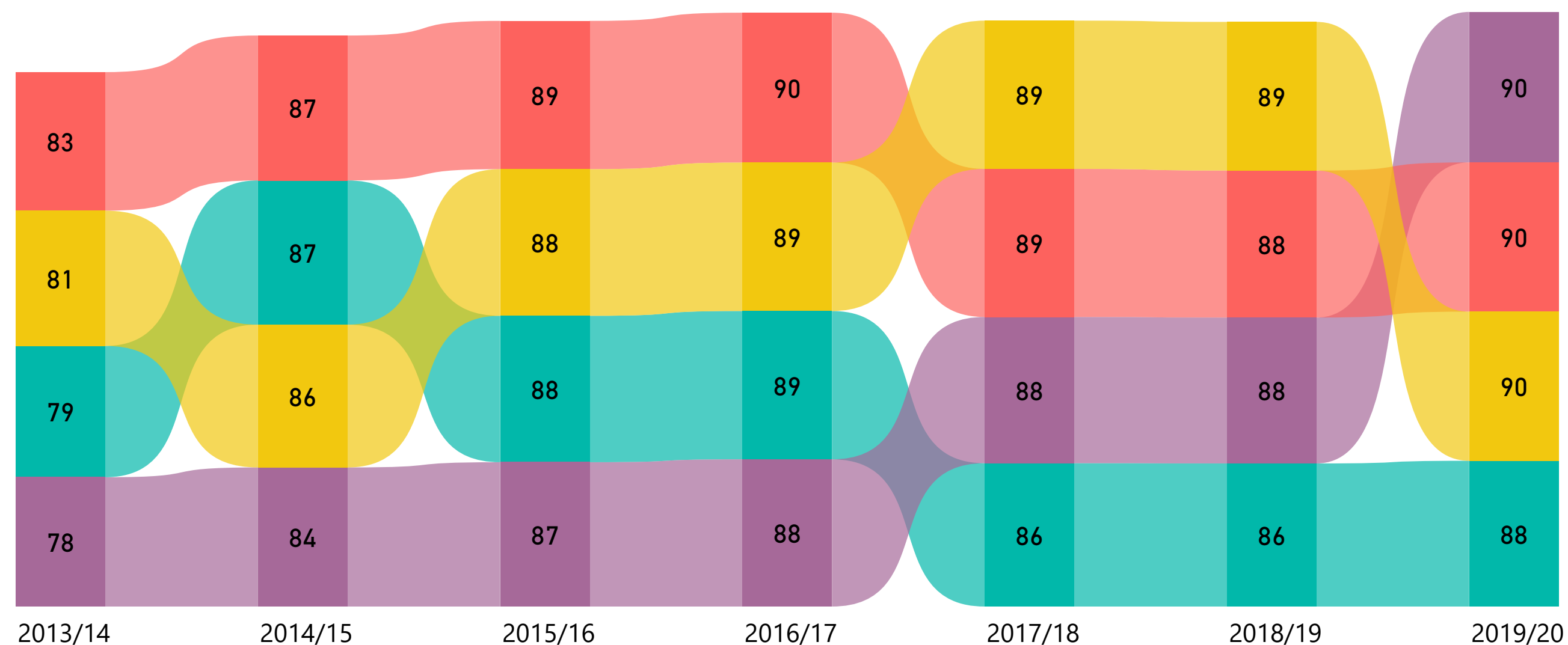
SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Establishment ● Aberdeen City ● Virtual Comparator ● The Northern Alliance ● National



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy
2013/14	1594
2014/15	1619
2015/16	1673
2016/17	1637
2017/18	1544
2018/19	1678
2019/20	1452

Improvement Targets

- Greater than 1% increase at SCQF Level 4
- Greater than 1% increase at SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

The combined outcomes for Level 4 show a 2% increase in the % of pupil candidates attaining Literacy and Numeracy at this Level. This increase is mirrored by the Virtual Comparator, that could indicate that the city's relative position is unchanged, although there is some closing to the National figure. At Level 5, there is a more pronounced improvement of 8%. This gain is greater than both benchmarks and would suggest a slight closing to the Virtual Comparator.

Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Literacy and Numeracy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD



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Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy

Local Benchmarking Measures

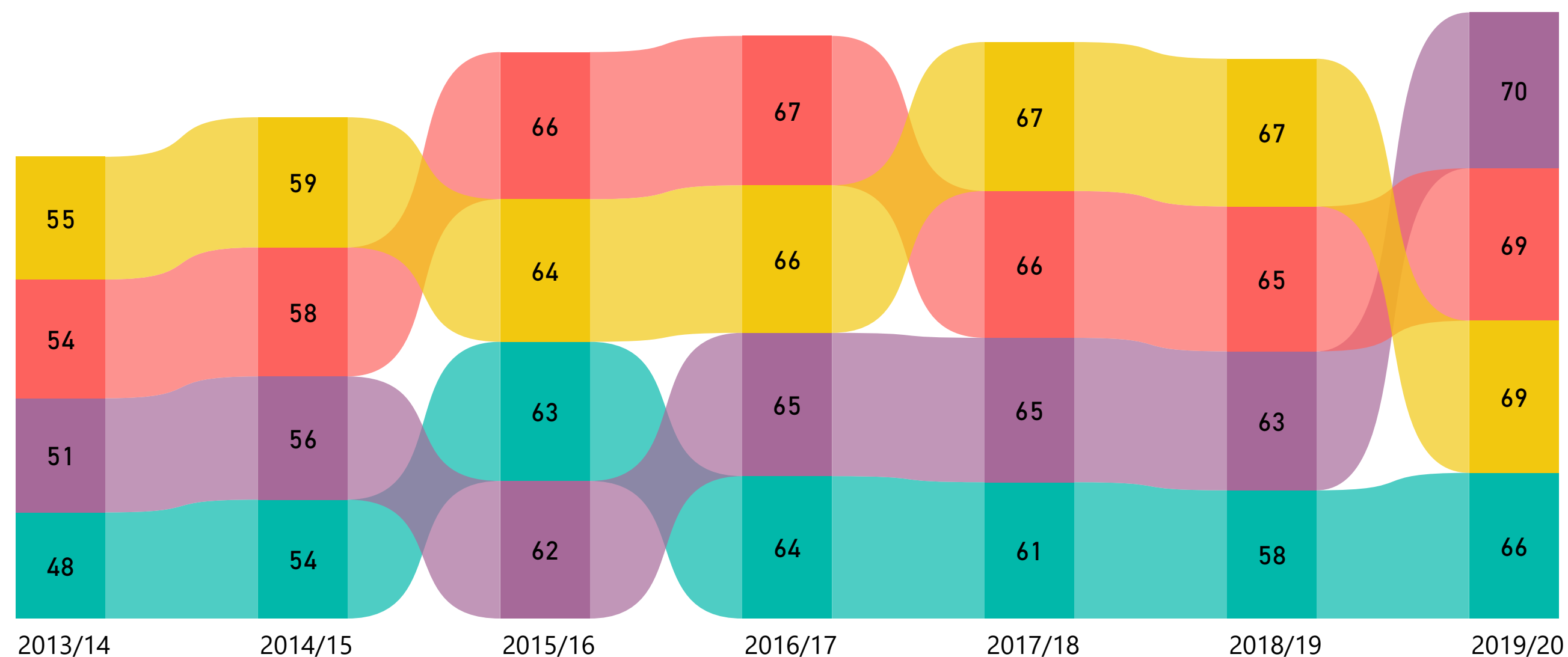
SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Establishment ● Aberdeen City ● Virtual Comparator ● The Northern Alliance ● National



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy
2013/14	1594
2014/15	1619
2015/16	1673
2016/17	1637
2017/18	1544
2018/19	1678
2019/20	1452

Improvement Targets

- Greater than 1% increase at SCQF Level 4
- Greater than 1% increase at SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

The combined outcomes for Level 4 show a 2% increase in the % of pupil candidates attaining Literacy and Numeracy at this Level. This increase is mirrored by the Virtual Comparator, that could indicate that the city's relative position is unchanged, although there is some closing to the National figure. At Level 5, there is a more pronounced improvement of 8%. This gain is greater than both benchmarks and would suggest a slight closing to the Virtual Comparator.



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

CECYP Literacy and Numeracy

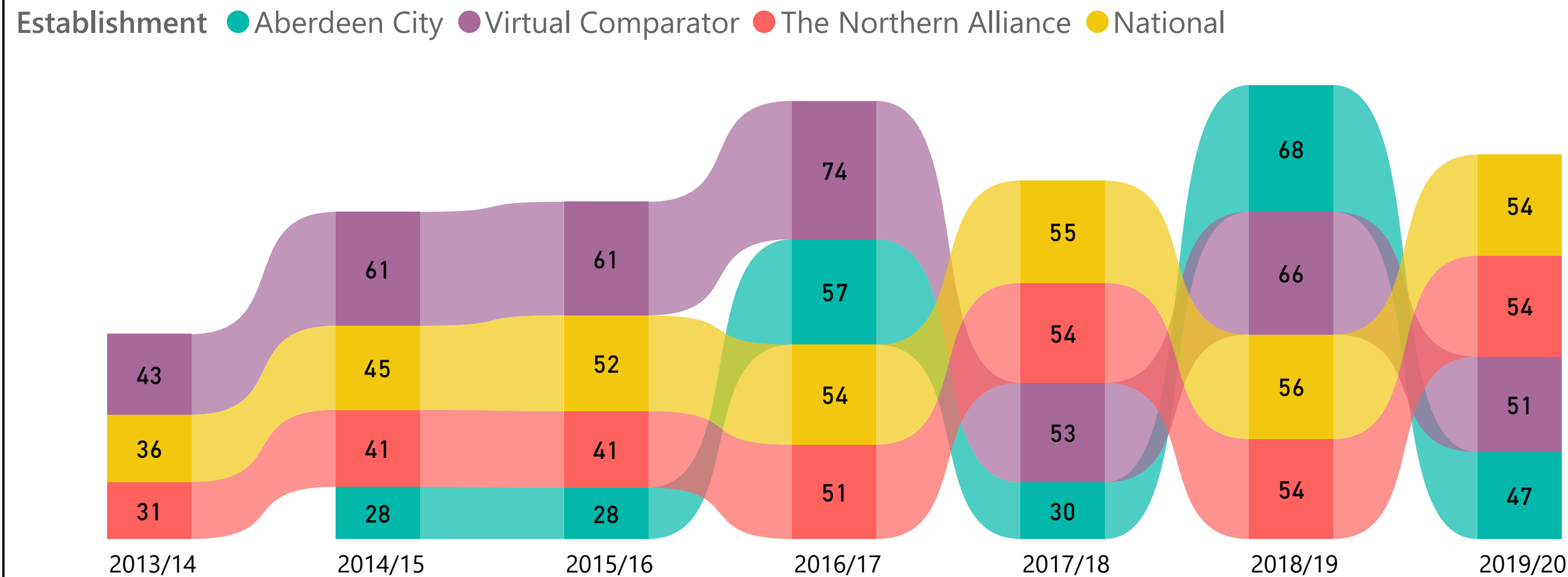
Local Benchmarking Measures

SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of CECYP Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy
2013/14	30
2014/15	25
2015/16	29
2016/17	30
2017/18	23
2018/19	22
2019/20	15

Improvement Targets

- 3% increase at SCQF Level 4
- 3% increase at SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

The number of Care Experienced Young People is considerably smaller than in previous years which makes comparison of outcomes through Insight significantly less robust and emphasises the value of providing attainment monitoring and support for these pupils in the context of individual dialogues which are provided through Schools and the Virtual School Head Teacher.



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

CECYP Literacy and Numeracy

Local Benchmarking Measures

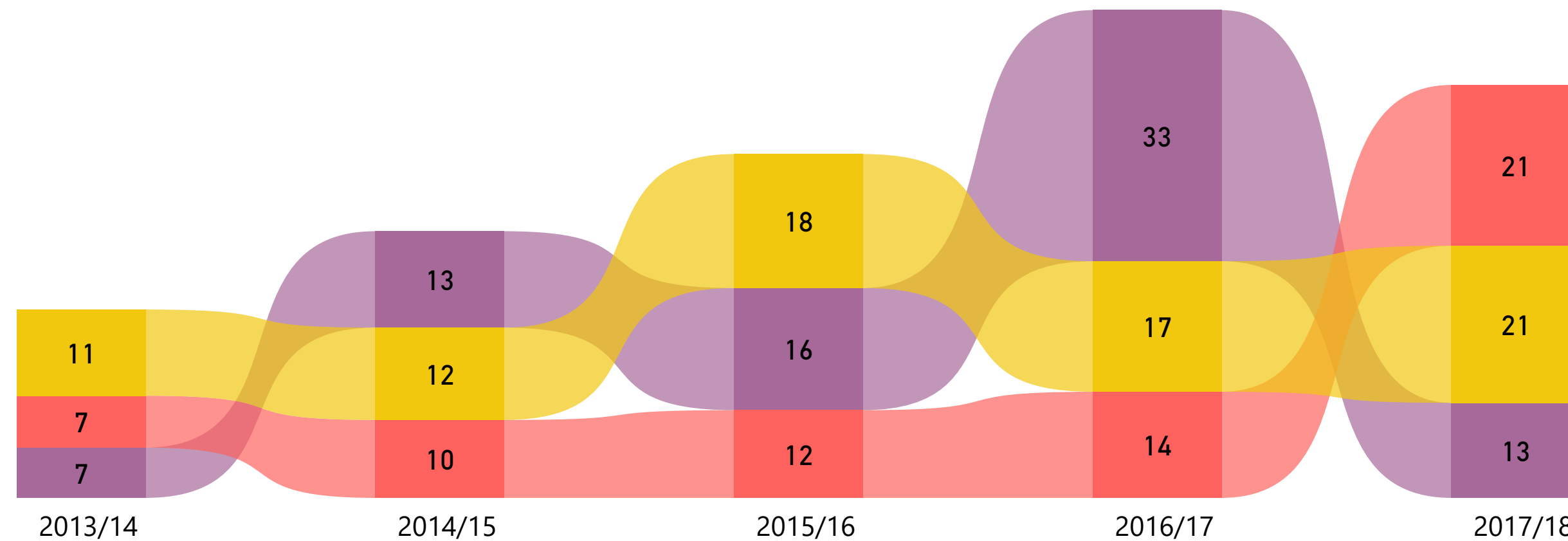
SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of CECYP Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Establishment ● Aberdeen City ● Virtual Comparator ● The Northern Alliance ● National



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy
2013/14	30
2014/15	25
2015/16	29
2016/17	30
2017/18	23

Improvement Targets

- 3% increase at SCQF Level 4
- 3% increase at SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

The number of Care Experienced Young People is considerably smaller than in previous years which makes comparison of outcomes through Insight significantly less robust and emphasises the value of providing attainment monitoring and support for these pupils in the context of individual dialogues which are provided through Schools and the Virtual School Head Teacher.



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

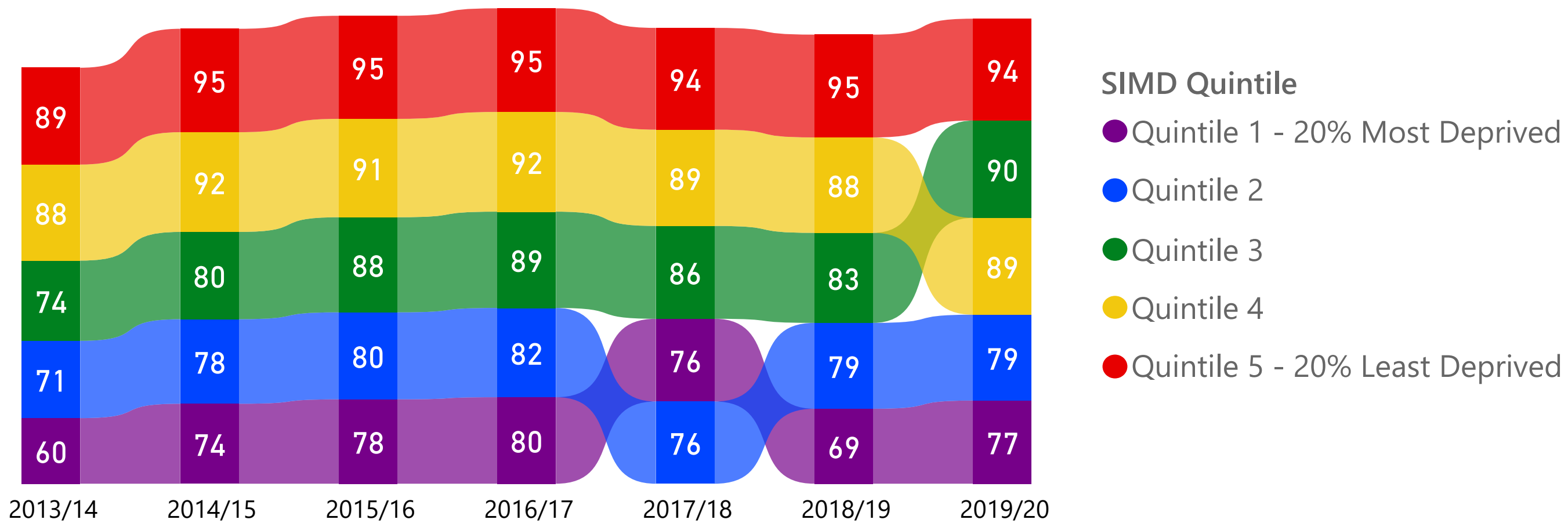
Local Benchmarking Measures

SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area by SIMD



Improvement Targets

Greater than 1% reduction in the percentage difference between the most and least deprived for literacy and numeracy at SCQF Level 4 and SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

Level 4. The most significant gains were made by young people in Quintiles 1 and 3 whilst performance was maintained in the remaining Quintiles.

This provides for a closing of the attainment gap against SIMD 5 in virtually every case, although this is less clear at SIMD 4

Level 5. As with the above, gains are evident in each Quintile, with closing of the gap being most pronounced at Quintiles 3 and 4 and limited changes for Quintiles 1 and 2

of Leavers in Cohort

SIMD Quintile	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Quintile 1 - 20% Most Deprived	288	243	305	177	168	168	141
Quintile 2	274	289	277	405	317	392	320
Quintile 3	203	209	201	194	214	199	164
Quintile 4	182	184	203	270	274	281	277
Quintile 5 - 20% Least Deprived	647	694	687	591	571	638	550



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Literacy and Numeracy by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

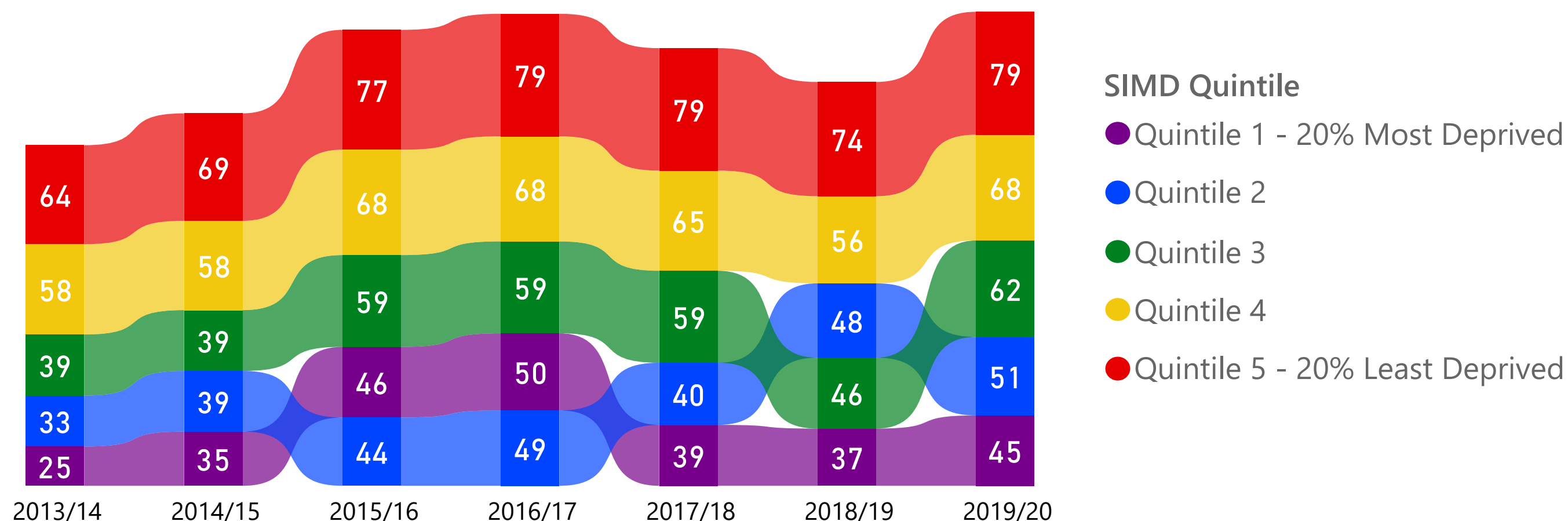
Local Benchmarking Measures

SCQF Level and Curricular Area

Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy

Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy

% of Leavers Achieving SCQF Level and Curricular Area by SIMD



Improvement Targets

Greater than 1% reduction in the percentage difference between the most and least deprived for literacy and numeracy at SCQF Level 4 and SCQF Level 5

Summary Analysis

Level 4. The most significant gains were made by young people in Quintiles 1 and 3 whilst performance was maintained in the remaining Quintiles.

This provides for a closing of the attainment gap against SIMD 5 in virtually every case, although this is less clear at SIMD 4

Level 5. As with the above, gains are evident in each Quintile, with closing of the gap being most pronounced at Quintiles 3 and 4 and limited changes for Quintiles 1 and 2

of Leavers in Cohort

SIMD Quintile	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
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Improving Attainment for All

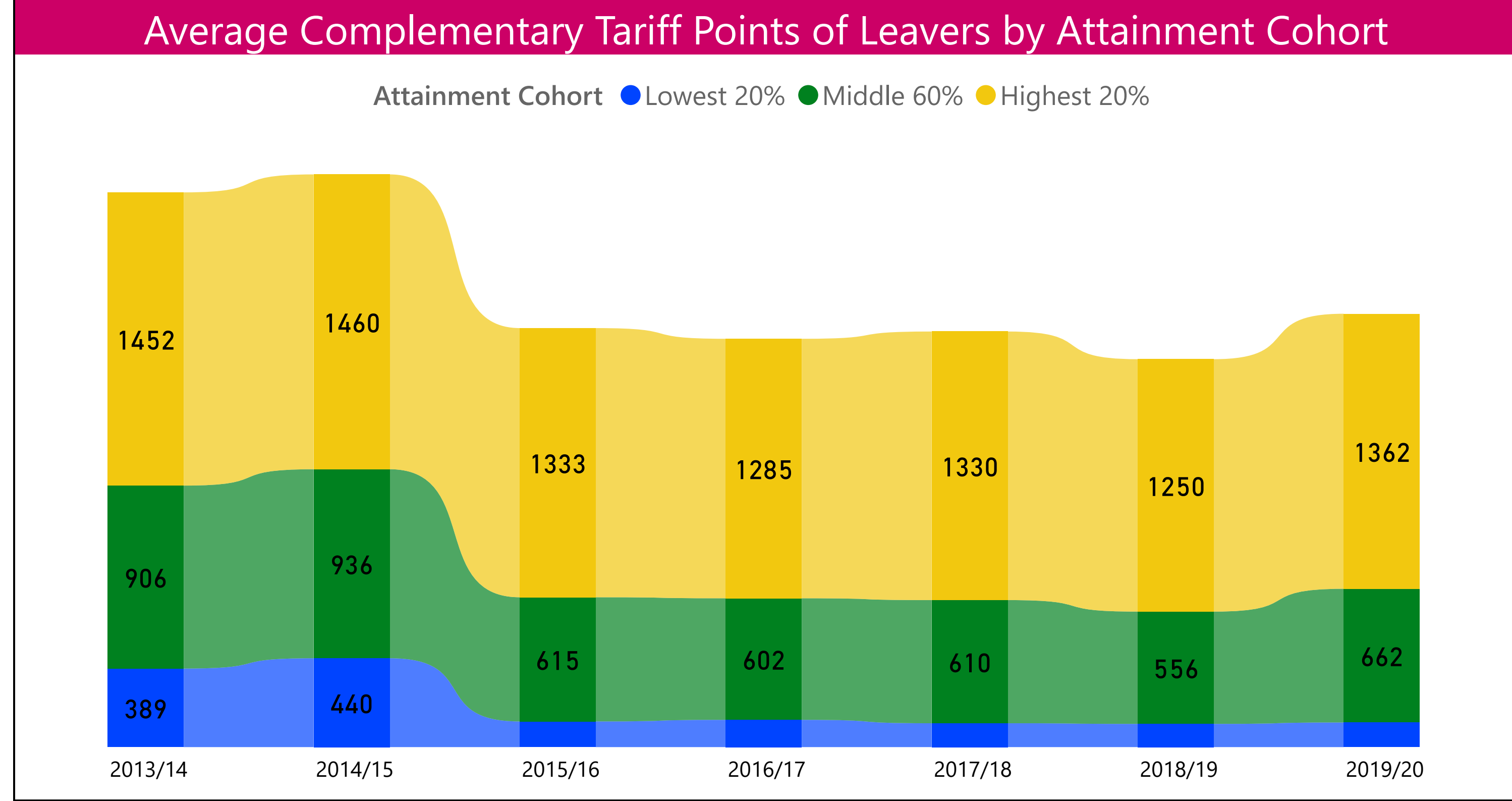
National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

Improving Attainment for All

Local Benchmarking Measures

of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	843
2014/15	834
2015/16	1673
2016/17	1637
2017/18	1539
2018/19	1678
2019/20	1452



Improvement Targets
 Greater than 1% increase for S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points

Summary Analysis
 Year-on-year gains are recorded against each of the three cohorts with the greatest improvement being noted in the Middle 60% (+ 19.6%) which closes the gap to the Highest 20% while the distance between the Lowest and Highest 20% is relatively stable statistically



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Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Literacy and Numeracy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

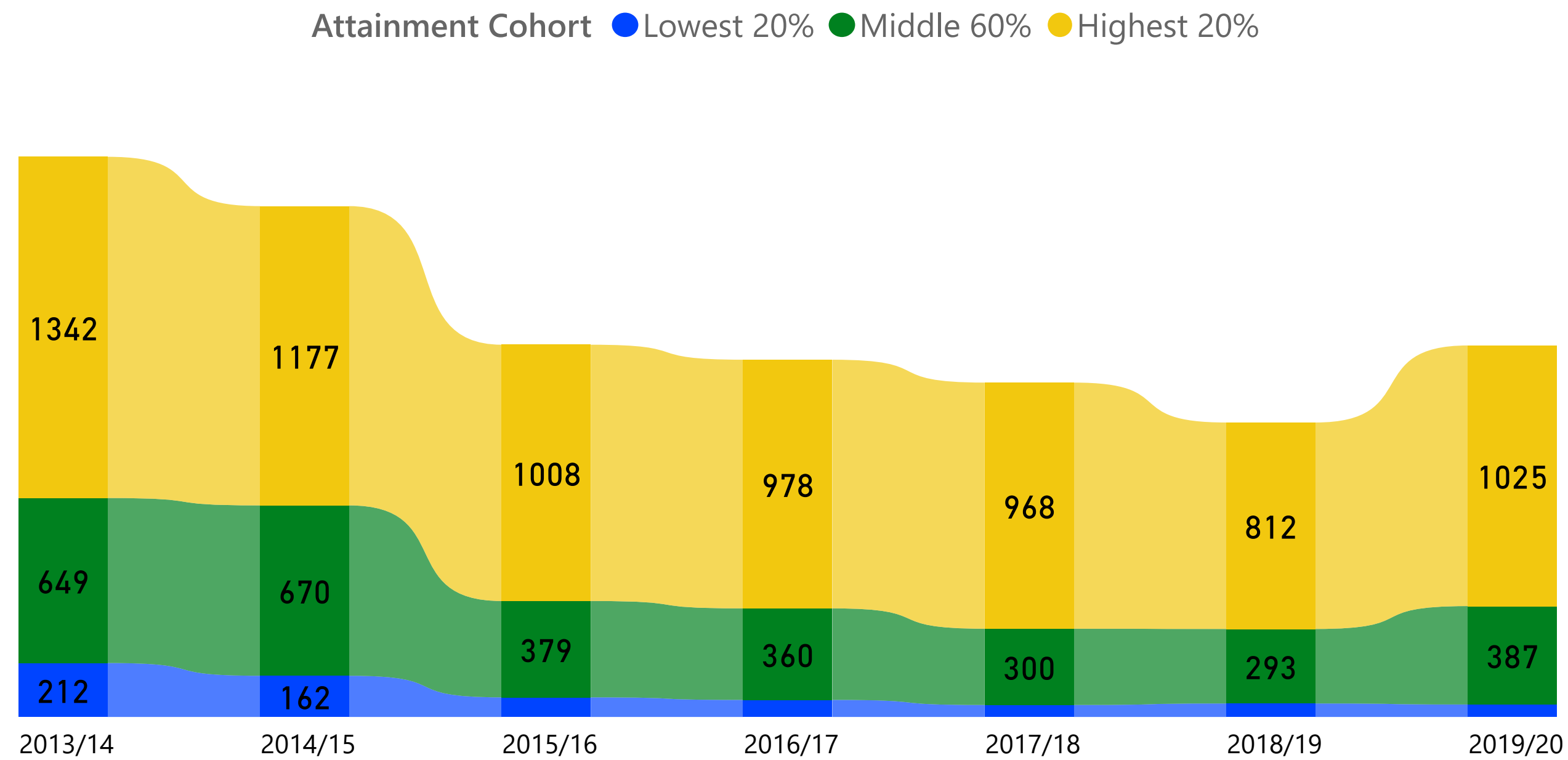
Improving Attainment for All by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures

SIMD Quintile



Average Complementary Tariff Points of Leavers by Attainment Cohort



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	79
2014/15	69
2015/16	305
2016/17	177
2017/18	166
2018/19	168
2019/20	141

Improvement Targets

Greater than a 1% reduction in the difference in S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points for 20% most and least deprived

Summary Analysis



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Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

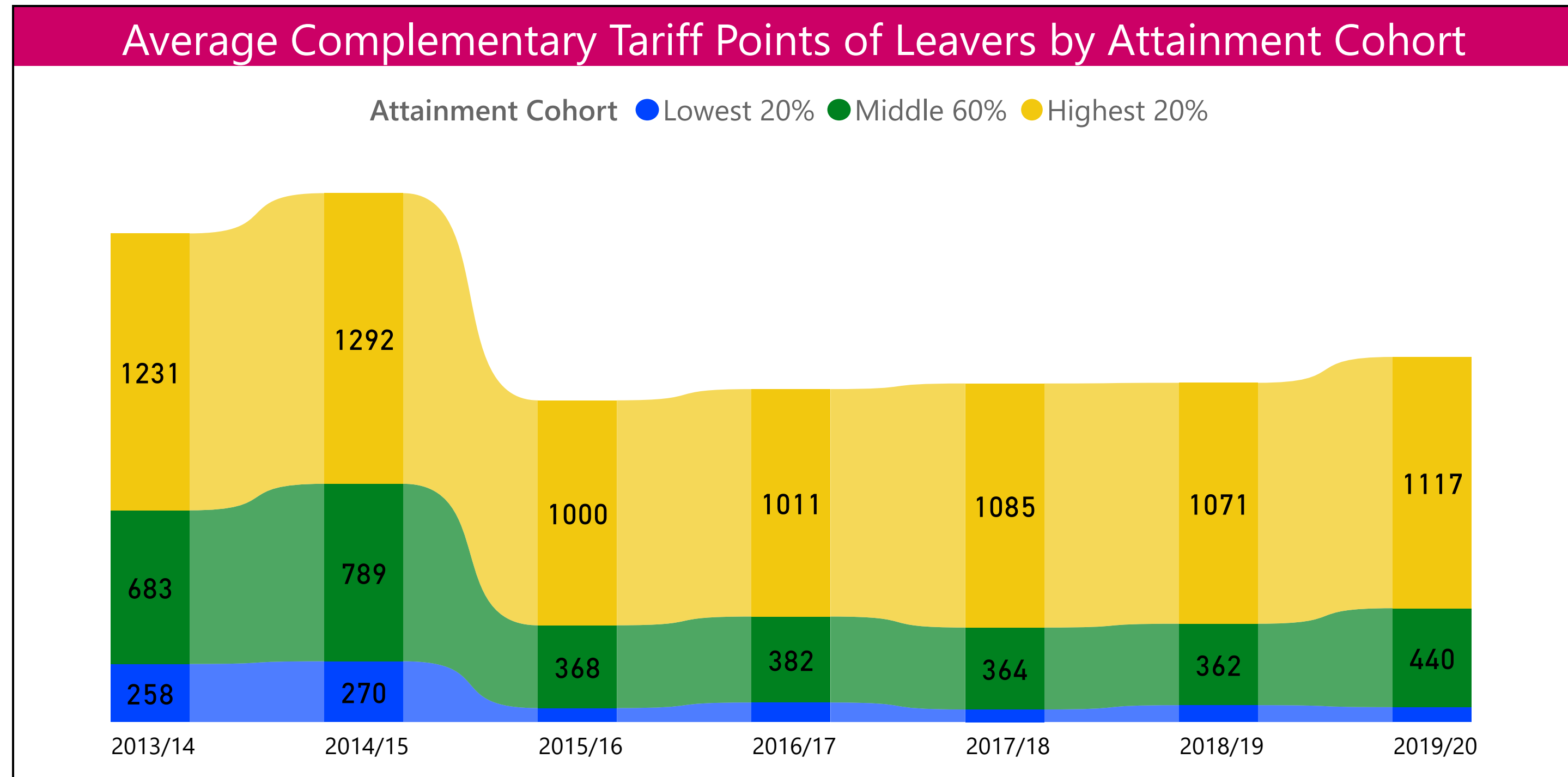
Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

Improving Attainment for All by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures

SIMD Quintile



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	105
2014/15	110
2015/16	277
2016/17	405
2017/18	316
2018/19	392
2019/20	320

Improvement Targets
Greater than a 1% reduction in the difference in S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points for 20% most and least deprived

Summary Analysis



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

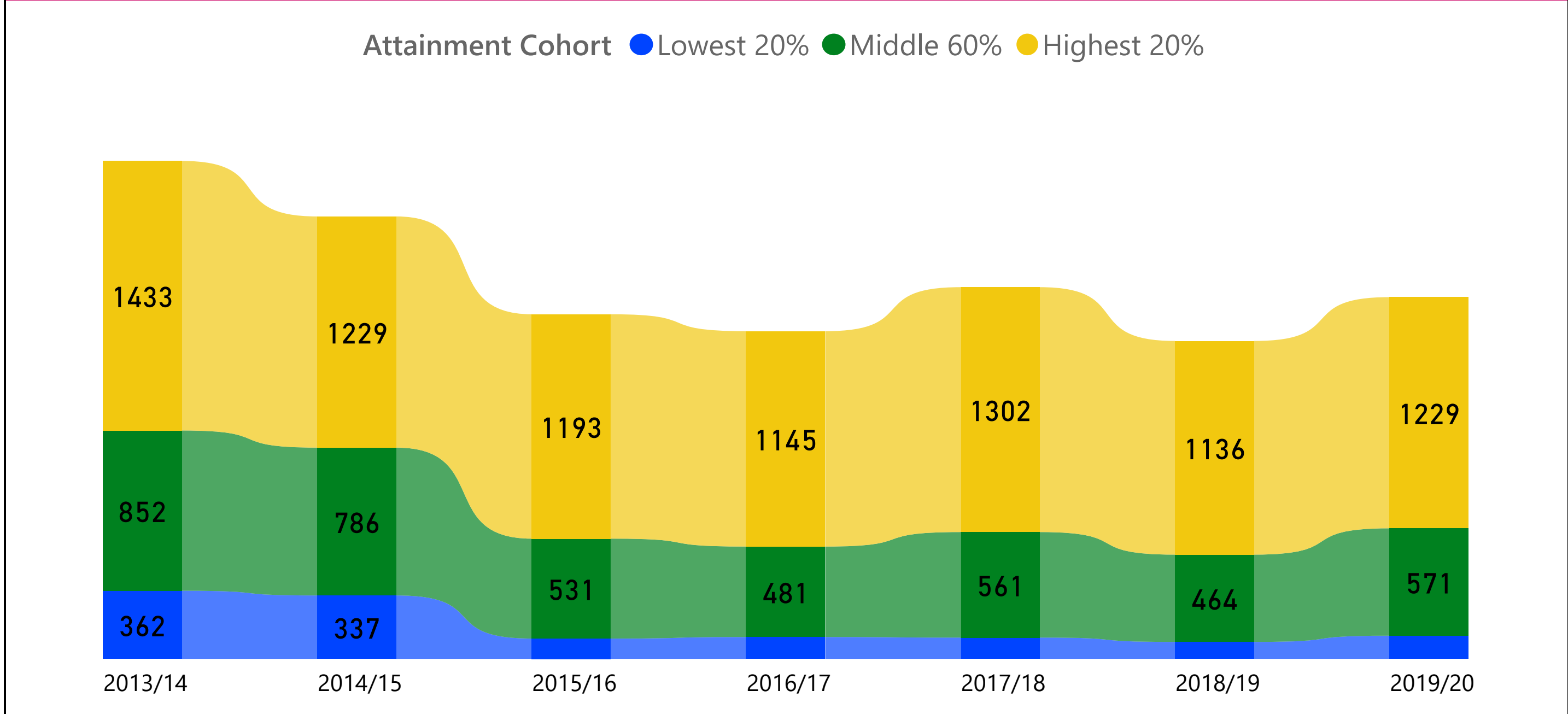
Improving Attainment for All by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures

SIMD Quintile



Average Complementary Tariff Points of Leavers by Attainment Cohort



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	89
2014/15	86
2015/16	201
2016/17	194
2017/18	214
2018/19	199
2019/20	164

Improvement Targets
Greater than a 1% reduction in the difference in S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points for 20% most and least deprived

Summary Analysis



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Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

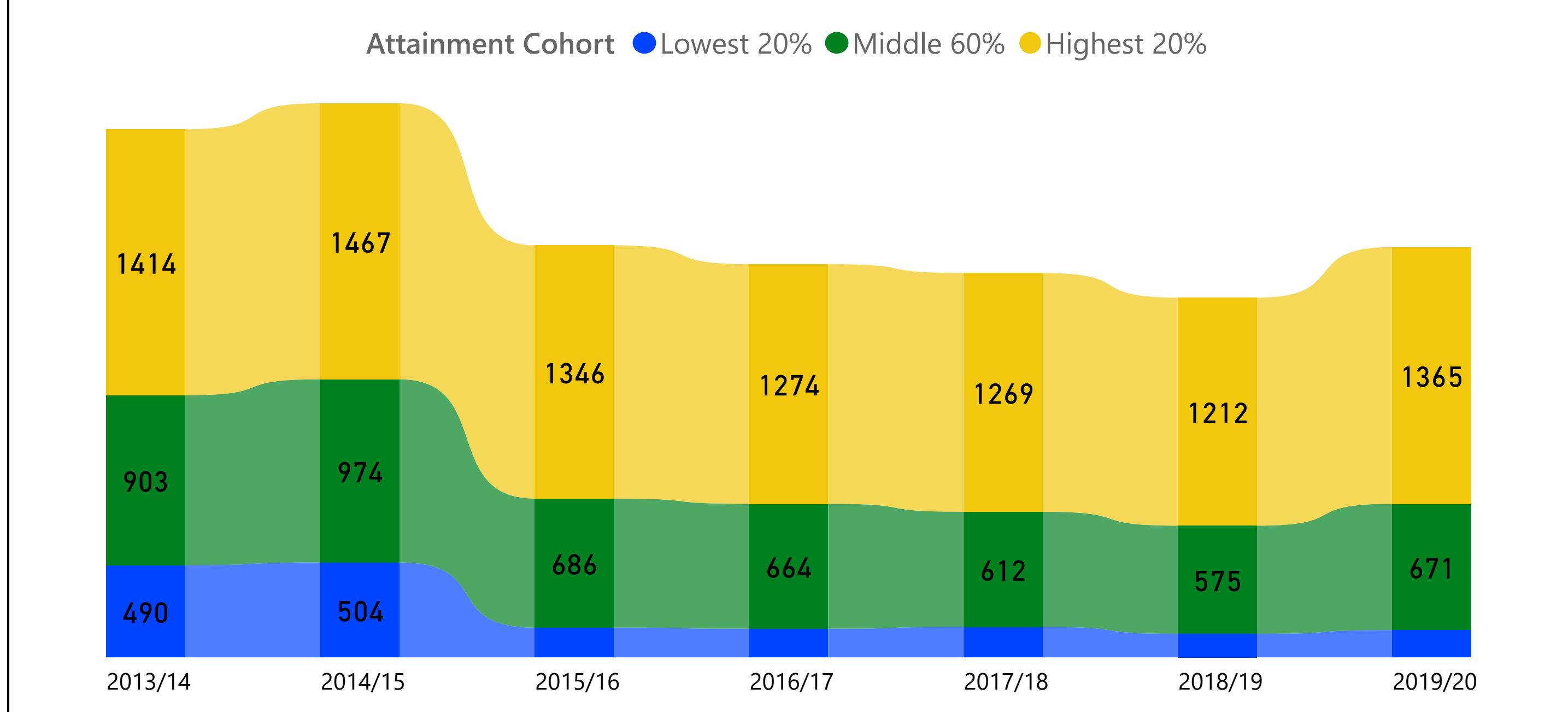
Improving Attainment for All by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures

SIMD Quintile



Average Complementary Tariff Points of Leavers by Attainment Cohort



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	111
2014/15	101
2015/16	203
2016/17	270
2017/18	273
2018/19	281
2019/20	277

Improvement Targets
Greater than a 1% reduction in the difference in S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points for 20% most and least deprived

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Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Literacy and Numeracy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD

Improving Attainment for All

National Benchmarking Measures: Improving Attainment for All, Average Complementary Tariff Points, Stage S6

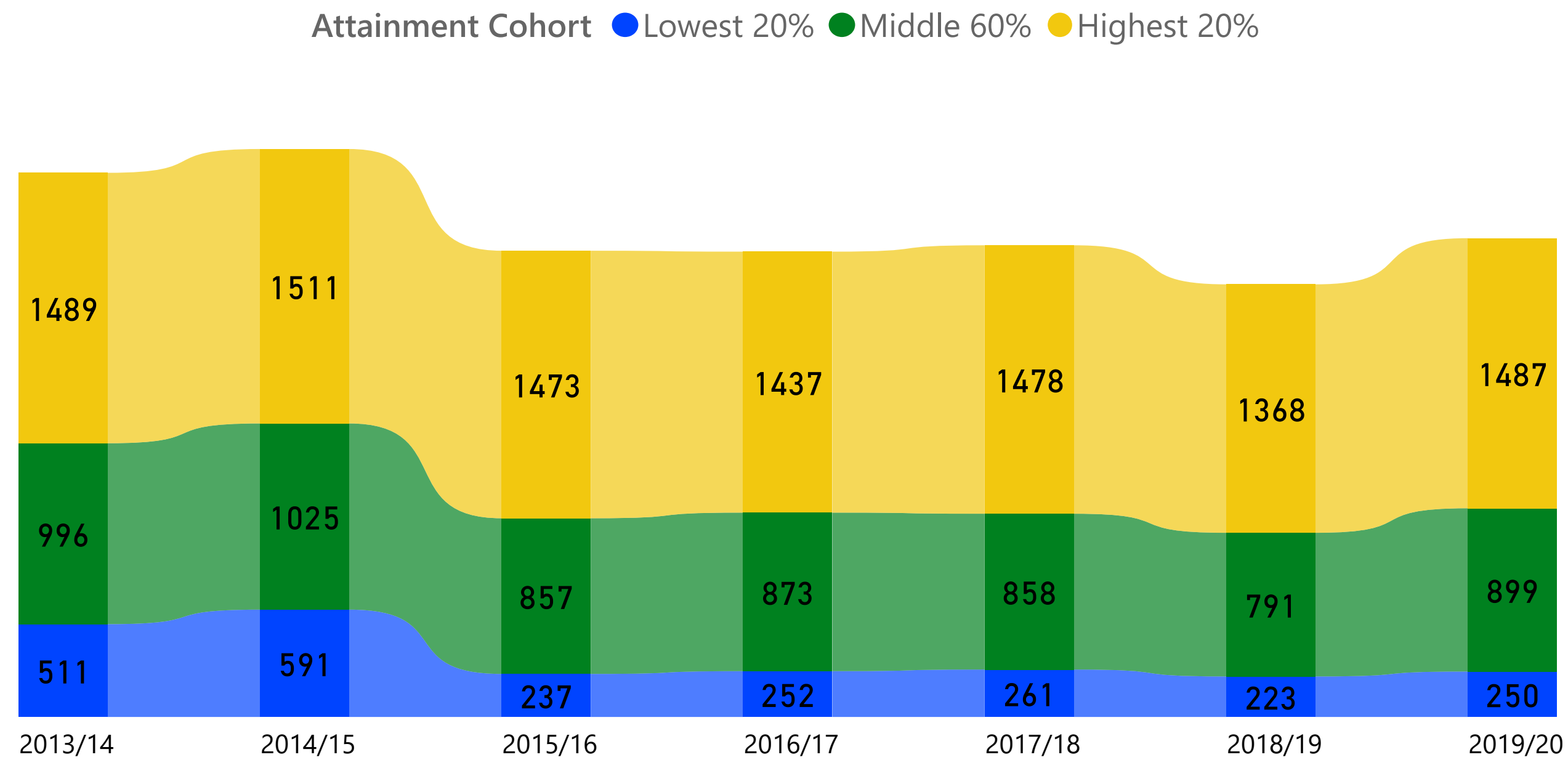
Improving Attainment for All by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures

SIMD Quintile

Quintile 1 - 20% Most Deprived	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 - 20% Least Deprived
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Average Complementary Tariff Points of Leavers by Attainment Cohort



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	459
2014/15	468
2015/16	687
2016/17	591
2017/18	570
2018/19	638
2019/20	550

Improvement Targets

Greater than a 1% reduction in the difference in S6 cohort based on cumulative (S4-6) average complementary tariff points for 20% most and least deprived

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Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Leaver Initial Destinations

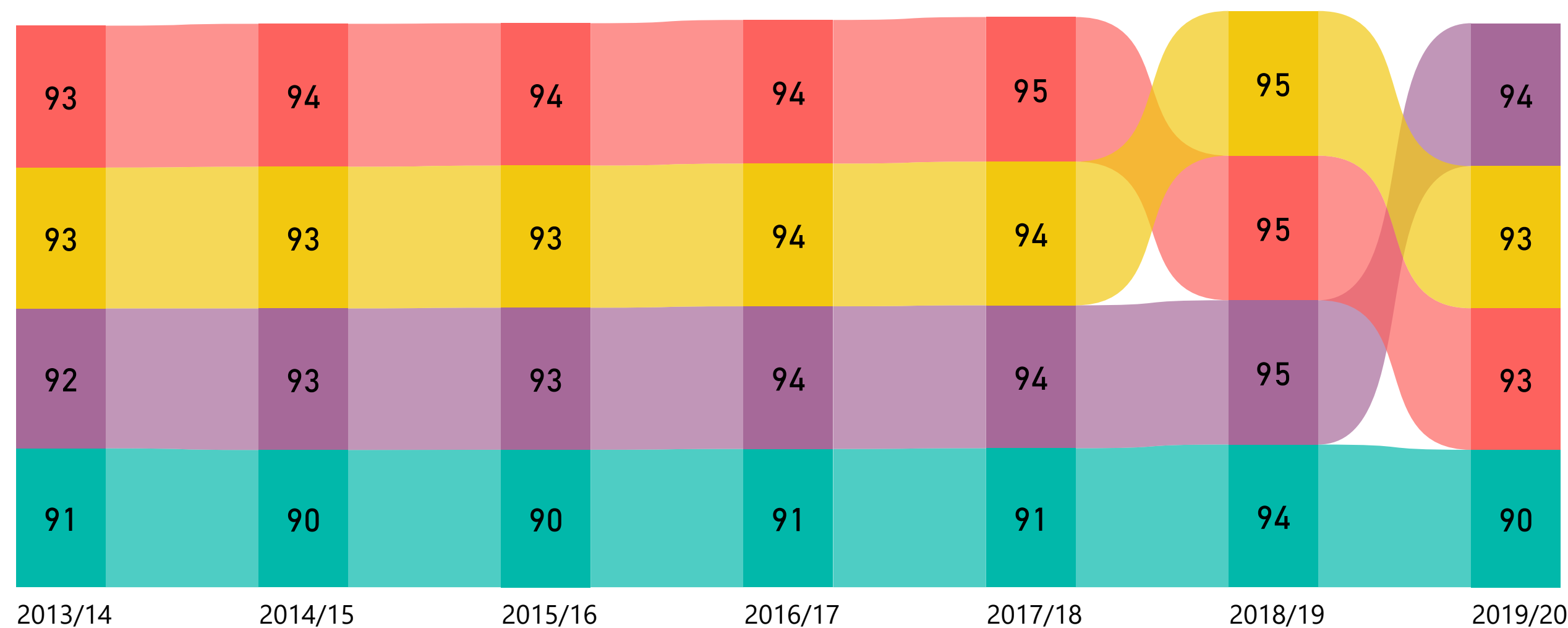
National Benchmarking Measures: Initial Leaver Destinations

Initial Leaver Destinations

Local Benchmarking Measures

% of School Leavers in a Positive Destination

Establishment ● Aberdeen City ● Virtual Comparator ● The Northern Alliance ● National



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	1594
2014/15	1619
2015/16	1673
2016/17	1637
2017/18	1544
2018/19	1678
2019/20	1452

Improvement Targets

Greater than 1% increase in school leaver positive destinations

Summary Analysis

The economic impact of COVID-19 has resulted in a 4% (rounded) fall in the percentage of leavers attaining a positive Initial Destination. Whilst the number of young people securing a Higher Education placement has significantly increased, there is a slight fall in those attending Further Education.

The critical loss of employment opportunities has clearly impacted the percentage of leavers in the two Unemployed categories (Seeking Employment and Not Seeking Employment)) and there is evidence that some training opportunities which young people had secured were unable to progress as planned due to restrictions impacting on the level of support available from companies and organisations due to contact limitations and the use of staff furlough schemes.



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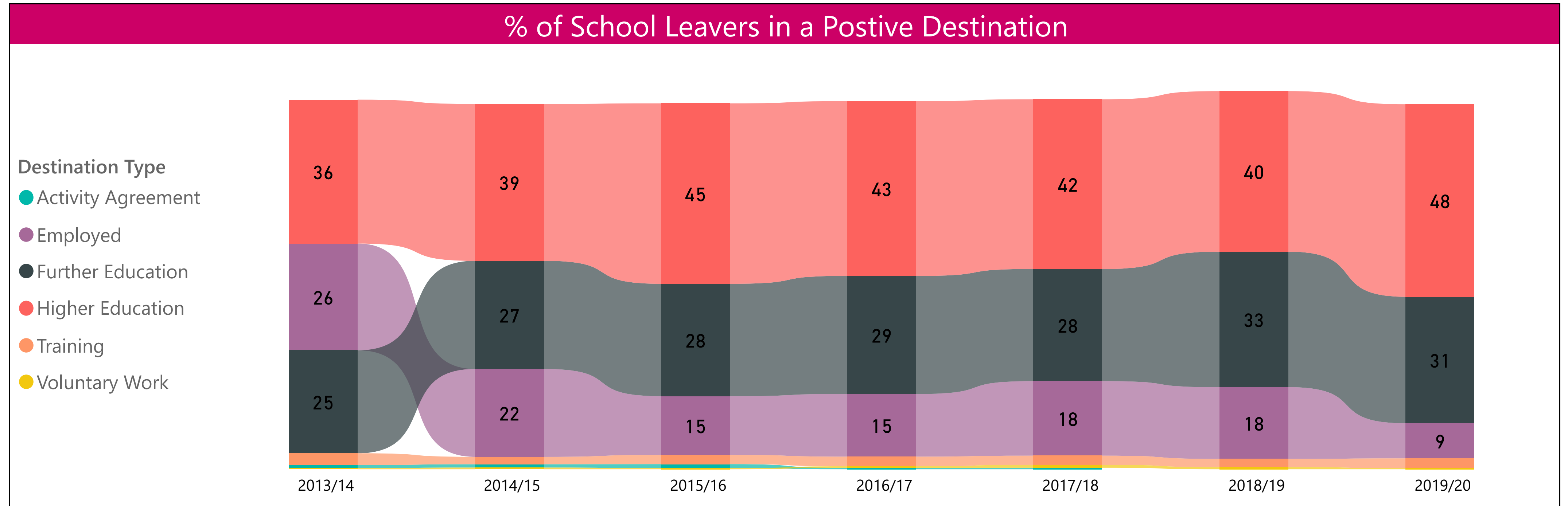
Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Leaver Initial Destinations

National Benchmarking Measures: Initial Leaver Destinations Breakdown

Initial Leaver Destinations Breakdown

Local Benchmarking Measures



of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Number in Cohort
2013/14	1594
2014/15	1619
2015/16	1673
2016/17	1637
2017/18	1544
2018/19	1678
2019/20	1452

Improvement Targets

Greater than 1% increase in school leaver positive destinations

Summary Analysis

Click button for summary analysis

Leaver Initial Destinations



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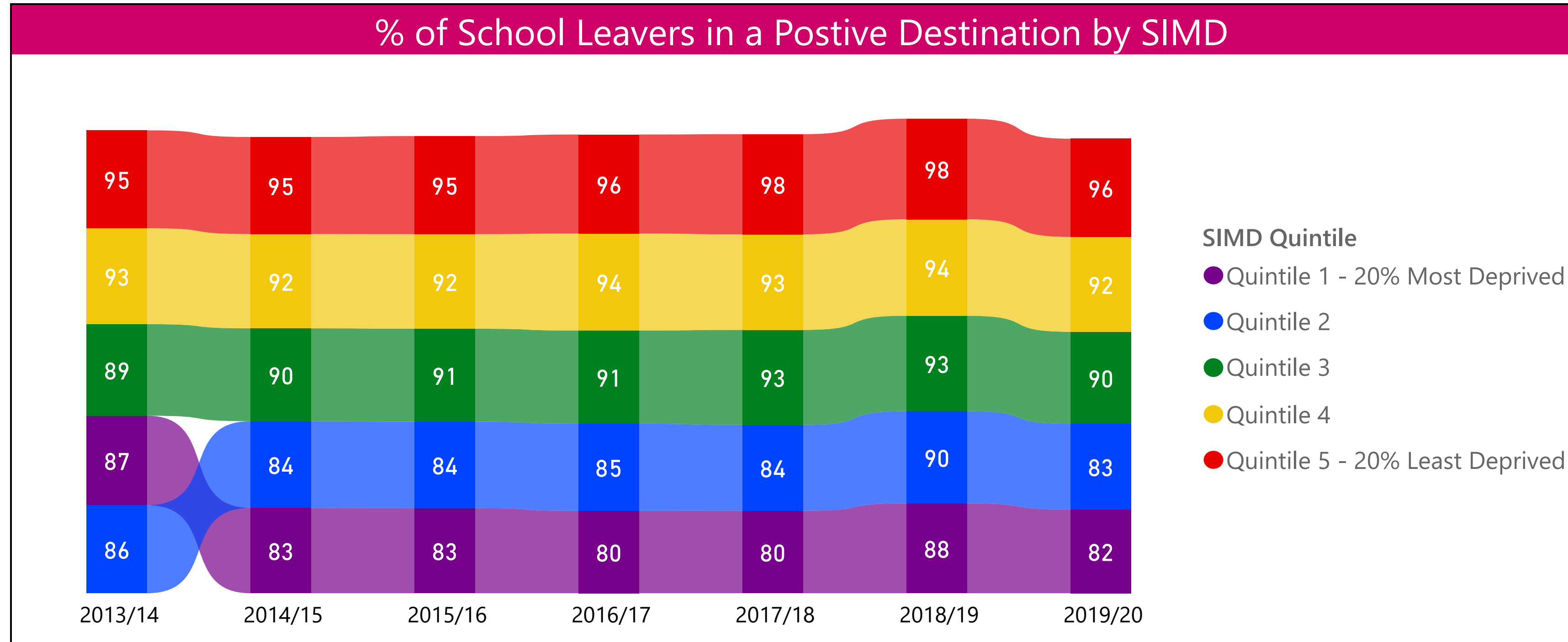
Additional NBM Senior Phase Data

Leaver Initial Destinations

National Benchmarking Measures: Initial Leaver Destinations by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Initial Leaver Destinations by SIMD

Local Benchmarking Measures



Improvement Targets

Greater than 1% reduction in the difference between the 20% most and least deprived school leavers in positive destinations

Summary Analysis

Each Quintile has been materially impacted by the downturn in the local economy, although it is evident that those living in areas of the highest SIMD based deprivation have been most impacted.

This is understood to be associated with the traditional direct movement from education to employment which is more prevalent among leavers from SIMD 1 and 2 areas.

of Leavers in Cohort

Year	Quintile 1 - 20% Most Deprived	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 - 20% Least Deprived
2013/14	288	274	203	182	647
2014/15	243	289	209	184	694
2015/16	305	277	201	203	687
2016/17	177	405	194	270	591
2017/18	168	317	214	274	571
2018/19	168	392	199	281	638
2019/20	141	320	164	277	550

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Appendix A

Education Service

Self-Evaluation

2020/2021

Education Service Self-Evaluation 2020/2021

The pandemic has changed the lives of all children, young people and families across Aberdeen City forever. Given the gravity of our collective experience and the changed outlook for the city and the city's children and families, this self-evaluation will extend more widely than a review of the impact of our National Improvement Framework Plan (NIF) and:

- take stock of progress made over the last 2 or 3 years; and
- reflect on how the service adapted to face the demands of the pandemic and begin to consider areas that require continued acceleration or further improvement activity in order to 'build back better'.

This self-evaluation will inform the development of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the associated National Improvement Framework Plan by identifying areas where our improvement has been achieved and sustained and those areas which will require further single or multi-agency commitment and resource to drive improvement.



Section 1 - Taking stock of progress

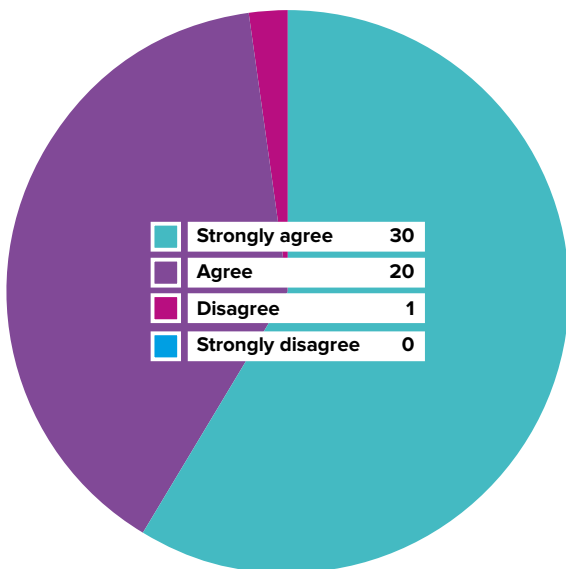
a) ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN OF THE EDUCATION SERVICE and CULTURE WITHIN THE SERVICE

Organisational Design

The Education Service was restructured in late 2018 to align the education structure with the principles set out in the Target Operating Model, promote improved quality, foster closer internal and external working practices, appoint leaders with the capability to help shape the education service and align the roles and remits of the central team to key strategic priorities.

The disconnect that previously existed across the school, early years and inclusion central teams has been eradicated with all central staff now working to a shared agenda as set out in the LOIP and associated NIF. Progress and any emerging risks are shared openly at Service Manager meetings where plans are put in place to collaboratively address areas of concern. This approach is helping to ensure that cross cutting themes are led collaboratively by one single senior education team and that expertise is freely pooled. Third Tier leaders are credible and bring significant experience of leading improvement to the service. Their experience of, ‘walking the walk’ has helped eliminate a divide that existed between the central team and schools previously.


‘As a newly appointed HT I have felt hugely supported and clear on the ACC Education goals. The central team have clear roles and remits which enables leaders to approach the relevant person for support and guidance and make ongoing improvement’. HT feedback Feb 2021



Both the school and Early Years’ teams below Service Manager level were restructured to drive improved quality, efficiency and recognise the contribution of a range of Community Planning Partners in supporting a child’s life. As a result, teams now work with a range of internal and external partners to serve a locality. Working relationships with Community Planning Partners are starting to become embedded and will be critical as we build back better.

The structural changes made over the past few years have helped shape a highly flexible central team structure that can respond to change at pace although the appointment of the right people is recognised to be as important as appointing to the right structure.

The integrity of the current structure will be maintained. This position was endorsed by school leaders in February 2021 when asked if the new structure had improved our collective response. The Best Value Audit of Aberdeen noted the considerable works undertaken in this area.



The service has established a Supporting Learners workstream to drive and report progress in transforming services for children with additional support needs. Improved data collection and data monitoring is helping to inform the work of the group. Angela Morgan's national review of Additional Support Needs continues to be used to further shape the work of the group.

'The structure was certainly needing an overhaul and pleased that this has been actioned. Clear pathways and remits now exist. Huge improvement in supporting ASN in particular. Looking forward to seeing how this restructuring develops and what impact this will bring over time as folk settle into their roles'. HT feedback February 2021

'I think the flattened structure and the accessibility and clarity it provides has helped communication and the sharing of ideas. It has also brought a much more focused vision'. HT feedback February 2021

Resource alignment and active measurement for visibility and improvement were not sufficiently in place and this has been addressed in part through the establishment of a new management structure for ASN services. Recruitment to the HT (ASN Services) is currently underway and enable us to better monitor the impact of city wide services to help drive continuous improvement.

The group has fostered a collaborative approach with Trade Union colleagues to review health and safety data associated with incidents in schools and made an improved professional learning offer available at different levels and these have been well received. The pandemic requires work around ASN services to be accelerated to ensure that resource is well efficiently and effectively utilised to support the changed needs of learners post pandemic and to ensure the service is well placed to response to any legislative change resultant from Angela Morgan's review. This area of work and will be critical as we build back better.

Developing a Culture of Collaboration

A culture of collaboration has been fostered where all opinions are welcomed and used to inform decision making. Longer term improvement is overseen by improvement groups comprising a mix of central offers and school leaders and short, twice weekly virtual Head Teacher meetings comprise a mix of formal and drop-in meetings to support operational practice. Attendance levels are high and opportunities to share learning are utilised to help spread best practice across the service. This area could be further developed now that a growing confidence is emerging as a result of our strong response to the pandemic. Collaboration has accelerated at pace over the last year and helped foster greater consistency, shared accountability, collective decision making and mutually supportive and respectful working across the service. A recent Thematic Review by Education Scotland highlighted that the positive culture and collective leadership were resulting in calmness across the service.

‘The sense of team work at all levels now is very evident. Communication and consultation has greatly improved. The different workstreams have been effective due to the involvement of both central team and Head Teachers and then fed back timely and effectively.’ HT feedback Feb 2021

‘It’s healthy and refreshing to have groups making decisions who are on the ground. Really grateful to colleagues who are part of the NIF groups who regularly feedback to the wider HT group.’ HT feedback 2021

‘This has improved, particularly during the pandemic, with increased voice for school leaders. We still require more time for consultation and for this to be seen as open and honest for all - sometimes it can appear that decisions have been fully made (admittedly with more collaboration) by groups’

HT feedback February 2021

Senior school leaders now work more collaboratively together and recognise their responsibilities in terms of the improvement of their own school and the schools of others. The implementation of the new Devolved School Management Scheme should bring greater empowerment to head teachers to use resource creatively to address the attainment and wellbeing needs of their community when fully implemented.

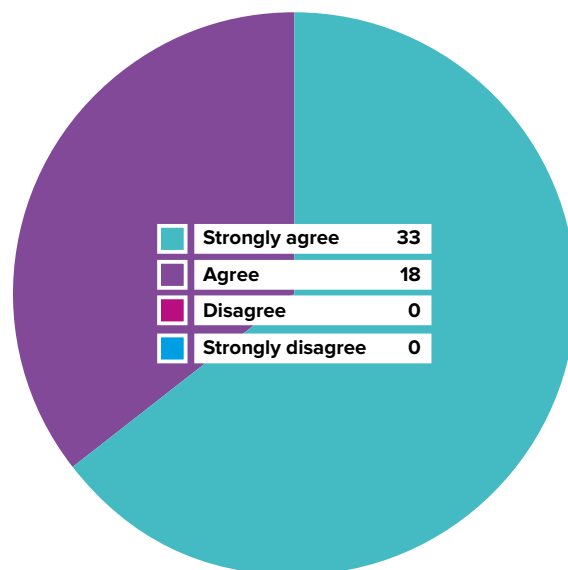
Collaboration with Trade Unions has been further extended over the last year as the pandemic triggered the establishment of weekly meetings between Trade Union representatives. Improved collaboration has extended to relationships between school leaders and Trade Union representatives at school level as staff teams have worked to develop and implement risk assessments. Respectful collaboration has helped the Education Service respond strongly to the pandemic and this approach will be maintained.

Work to improve collaboration across Children and Family Services has also accelerated with a key catalyst being the establishment of Hubs for children and young people in need of care and protection over the first period of lockdown. This saw practitioners come together and, having experience of the benefits of multi-disciplinary working, to champion and advocate for long term change. Joint work associated with the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare and the establishment of the Fit Like Hubs is driving the pooling of expertise and resource. This work is now being extended beyond children’s social work and education as we work to align further with health and other Community Planning Partners. This will help further drive efficiency and maximise our collective impact as we move forward.

Closer working across the Organisation has realised a number of benefits to both the service and individual schools with educationalists able to focus on driving improvements in attainment and wellbeing while benefiting from the expertise available across the organisation. The Health and Safety team, Facilities teams and Corporate Landlord have been instrumental in supporting preparations to re-open school buildings after the periods of lockdown. This closer working has enabled the education service to focus more exclusively on performance and on delivery against education legislation and this has removed risk to the organisation. Closer working across functions and between school and central staff has enabled the Service to benefit and learn from the experiences of others more readily. This will be further developed as we ‘build back better’.

As more collaborative working practices have become embedded, the service has been able to strengthen ‘the middle’, achieve higher levels of consistency and give the service the capacity and capability to improve quality across the system.

An improved culture of collaboration and shared accountability is helping to realise a slight improvement in attainment. The more collaborative approaches to improvement will be maintained. This positive evaluation was endorsed by school leaders.

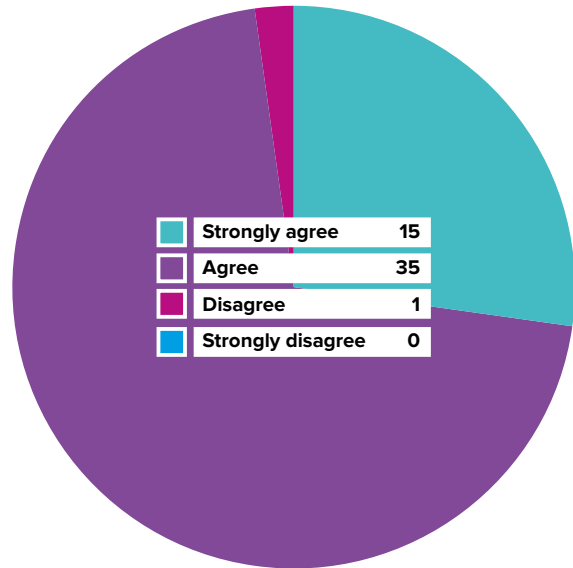


b) OUR IMPROVEMENT MODEL FOR IMPROVING LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Leadership of Improvement

The leadership of improvement is facilitated by Quality Improvement Managers/Service Managers in collaboration with senior leaders in schools. This has built a shared ownership and accountability for improvement and enabled the service to benefit from expertise across the wider system. Head teachers are increasingly driving improvement on behalf of the Local Authority. Stronger collaborative working practices have unleashed greater capacity for improvement and an accelerated pace of change. This approach would benefit from a regular opportunity for each improvement group having the opportunity to report to the wider HT body and this will be built into arrangements for next session.

As well as each Quality Improvement Manager/Service Manager facilitating improvement work on themes within our National Improvement Framework Plan, they oversee and support quality improvement in schools across a locality and set the scope of the work of Quality Improvement Officers and others. This approach ensures that those leading the strategic direction of the Education Service remain aware of emerging issues on the ground and has removed any disconnect experienced previously. School leaders agree that this approach is supporting service improvement.



Quality Improvement Visits

The approach to quality improvement visits in schools has been refreshed with a key focus on the core Quality Indicators and areas of identified vulnerability, visits now comprise a balance of compliance and quality checks. The refreshed approach helps ensure that school self-evaluation judgements are more consistency applied across all schools and help prioritise the work of the central team.

‘Very useful to work across trios and have the opportunity to visit other schools and critically evaluate practice.’ HT feedback Feb 2021

Approaches were successfully adapted to take account of the operating environment during the pandemic and help elicit a city-wide overview of the changed situation on the ground to inform strategic planning and prioritisation. Approaches will continue to be regularly evaluated and refreshed to ensure that they add value to the service.

The establishment of Locality Leads to support improvement across Partner Provider and Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings has enabled the service to ensure consistently high levels of support and challenge to all ELC settings and closer working with other partners serving a locality. The pattern of local authority settings being graded more poorly than funded provider settings has been fully addressed.

A disconnect and mixed messaging between quality improvement teams for schools and in ELC evident previously, has been addressed by quality improvement teams undertaking quality improvement visits together and this consistency will continue to be worked on. There is evidence that the work of Locality Leads and school Quality Improvement teams is supporting more positive gradings by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland although the lack of recent inspections makes this hard to firmly evidence at this point. School/setting self-evaluation grades have improved.

Learning from quality improvement visits informs service plans and priorities. One cycle of school visits highlighted that the previous lack of cohesion across the central team had resulted in a lack of consistent understanding of the learning, teaching and assessment standards expected of schools. Resultant low staff confidence levels had limited creative and innovative practice. This was addressed through the development of an interactive digital Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard and there are some innovative approaches now emerging digitally across the City. The Standard guides the work of practitioners and school leaders and is refreshed on a monthly basis to ensure that it continues to reflect best current practice and research. This work will continue as we continue to move between operating models.

‘Staff have hugely benefitted from the updated Learning and Teaching Standard.’ HT feedback February 2021

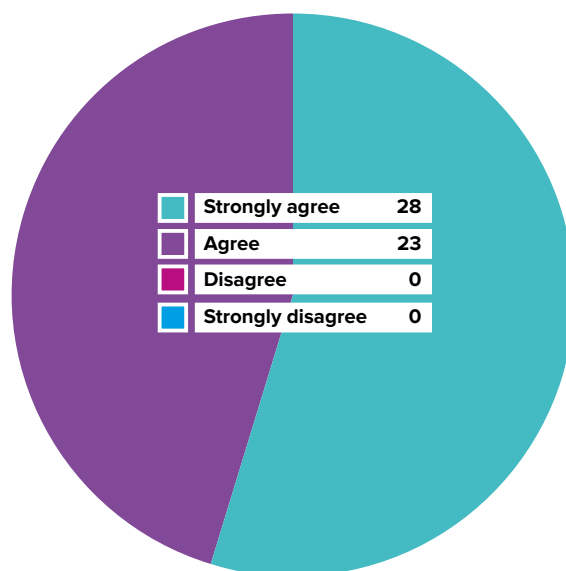
Refreshed approaches to Quality Improvement provide school senior leaders with opportunities to support quality improvement across the city through active participation in the quality improvement process in other schools. This allows school leaders to observe practice in other schools and engage in robust professional dialogue with other colleagues to help cement their understanding of standards against the core QIs. Our work with secondary colleagues to share the standard prior to implementation of the Alternative Certification Model was highlighted as best practice during a recent Education Scotland thematic review.

‘The new approach has built up a professional trust and relational leadership. It has been firmly based with the grounding that all leaders should have the opportunity to grow and develop and work towards a shared vision. Whilst the pandemic has in some way changed this work it has created further opportunities to improve approaches to learning and teaching delivery via an online platform. This leadership has been at all levels as all staff have worked collaboratively to support each other and improve standards within and across the education system.’

HT feedback February 2021

Qualitative feedback suggests that this approach is helping to further develop a shared understanding of ‘the standard’ and a mechanism for school leaders to collaborate for improvement.

Many of those who have had opportunities to engage in quality improvement visits out with their own settings have shown both capacity and eagerness to play a greater role and this enthusiasm will be harnessed as we continue to build capacity and develop sustainable and self-supporting approaches. This purposeful collaboration will now be extended beyond Head Teachers to formalise the arrangements in place for class teachers, subject specialists and middle managers; and will be a key priority for implementation as we build back better. School leaders feel that the changes to our quality improvement approaches and the development of the Learning and Teaching standard have supported our improvement, all staff who responded either agreed or strongly agreed.



There is now a need to use quality improvement visits to help determine how we support Children's Rights and any legislative changes resulting from the review of Additional Support for Learning and the Independent Care Review. There is also a need to consider approaches in light of any potential changes to governance (as suggested in the International Advisors report of December 2020) to ensure an uninterrupted focus on quality.

Planning for and Supporting Improvement

The National Improvement Framework Plan is now better aligned with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and reflects areas of vulnerability across the service and those identified in the LOIP. School Plans evidence sufficient alignment with the service plan and, critically, take account of local circumstances. Plans are quality assured, with quality improvement visits offering an opportunity to check in on progress. The school and service plans have been wide ranging and ambitious, there is now a need to explore fewer key areas with more rigour to address some of the long-standing issues evident in the data and the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The systems established to support professional learning are more effectively addressing the needs of the service by being more effectively focussed.

The Northern Alliance provides a range of professional learning opportunities and networks for staff in areas identified by all 8 Local Authorities forming the Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC). Networking opportunities are considerable at Chief Education Officer and Third Tier level and some of these provide opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other. A wide range of support is currently allocated to each RIC by the 'support arm' of Education Scotland. The Education Scotland team works with RIC Officers to develop and deliver professional learning and offer further opportunities for collaboration. Engagement is not consistent across all schools, but opportunities are made available to all leading to highly variable evaluations of the impact of the Regional Improvement Collaborative. At times the wealth of opportunities available to staff can be hard to navigate and there can be duplication.

The service can experience challenges in monitoring progress against the many plans the service works to and there is a need to ensure that one Plan captures all improvement activity. One plan, which is inclusive of all statutory Plans and Reports will help streamline our approaches to monitoring and evaluation and improve visibility of deadlines across the service. The service will work to establish this alignment as the NIF for 2021/2022 is developed.

Partnerships for improvement – working with the Community Planning Partnership

Children and families in many school communities, benefit from effective partnership working at locality level through their Partnership Forum. Around half of the Partnership Forums are able to demonstrate the impact of this joint working. The Covid-19 restrictions negatively impacted this work as all partners delivered an emergency response to the situation. The service should now work to better drive evidenced based collaboration with Community Planning Partners across each locality to ensure that resource and decision making is consistently driven by impact data.

The service works with Community Planning Partners on many of the stretch outcomes of the LOIP. Work driven by the improvement charters in the LOIP had led to an increase in the number of partners delivering courses across the Senior Phase, an increase in the uptake of Foundation Apprenticeships and a rise in the number of positive destinations for those living in the most deprived areas of the city.

The stretch outcomes remain very relevant to the work of the service and the re-refresh of the LOIP has provided an opportunity to reflect on how to further maximise the impact of our work. Moving forward we are likely to see a more limited number of improvement charters as this will enable Community Planning Partners to prioritise and ensure sufficient resource is available to drive and support the improvements.

Close collaboration across the Community Planning Partnership will be key as we build back better.

Partnership for improvement – Parents and Carers

Head Teachers work in partnership with parents and carers to develop improvement plans and maintain regular channels of communication. Communication and engagement with parents and carers has looked quite different over the last 12 months as school staff have supported parents to enable their child to engage positively with Google Classroom. There is anecdotal evidence of increased numbers of parents and carers attending meetings when they are held virtually and evidence of closer collaboration over the last year. These changes and opportunities will be taken into account as the Parental Involvement & Engagement Plan is refreshed.



Partnership for improvement – children and young people

All schools continue to have representative pupil groups who drive improvement and inform practice at school and community level with children and young people taking a leading role in delivering training and supporting their peers. The establishment of Young Leaders of Learning has helped children and young people have a clearer voice in improvement planning.

Over the last three years, the majority of Aberdeen City schools (73%) have engaged in the Right Respecting Schools Programme and the city now boasts 7 Gold RRSA award schools, 10 Silver RRSA award schools and 22 Bronze RRSA award schools.

Aberdeen City continues to liaise closely with Community Planning Partners to work towards achieving our ambition to becoming a UNICEF accredited 'Child Friendly City' (CFC). Significant work has been undertaken to evaluate our current practices and approaches and to inform the creation of a joint action plan which will be supported and delivered by a range of our Community Planning Partners. Through discussion with a range of professionals and young people, we will be prioritising a number of key areas in accordance with the award framework. These are:

- Culture
- Communication
- Co-operation and Leadership
- Place
- Participating and,
- Child-Friendly Services.

To ensure that the views of children and young people are genuinely considered when taking decisions which affect them, the Education Service will routinely adopt a child rights-based approach (CRBA) to the design, development and commissioning of services and approaches as we move forward. These approaches will support the service to continue to take an asset-based view of our children and young people.

Working within a Children's Rights based approach appropriate professional learning will be required for all adults who support children and young people. Awareness raising will also be required with school stakeholders and partners as well as an agreed approach to identifying and sharing best practice.

Using data to drive improvement

The service has access to a wide range of data and has improved its use of data over the last 3 years. Most validated data sets are historical and this has impacted on the responsiveness of the service at times.

Spending on school provision has increased in cash terms from 13/14 but reduced in real terms by 0.9%. If Scottish Attainment Challenge monies are removed this reduction sits at 2.9%. Given that this year may be the last of Attainment Challenge resource there is a clear need to ensure that interventions are sustainable, and this will influence school plans. A steady reduction in spend is evident in trend data, with costs not increasing as quickly as the Scottish average. Primary school spend is at the lower end of Family Group Local Government Benchmarking data and ranked 11 out of the 32 Local Authorities for efficiency. Secondary spend is sitting in the middle of the Family Group and ranked 21 out of 32, this is an improvement of the ranking from last year. The proportionately higher spend in secondary is thought to be as a result of smaller, less efficient secondary schools.

Although attainment data from 2020 is not directly comparable with that of previous years (and only available for secondary) historical data shows a gradual improvement in the number of children and young people achieving CfE Levels in primary. There continues to be local and national evidence to suggest the need for a focus on literacy and numeracy.

Green shoots are evident in senior phase destinations data although the lack of direct data comparison with that of previous years presents challenges. The first Insight data release suggests that improved breadth is resulting in more positive outcomes for young people. The data shows a closing of the distance to national outcomes and notable improvement in vocational attainment. The poverty related attainment gap is reducing.

The percentage of school leavers achieving 1+ qualifications at SCQF level 5 or better has improved by 3.5% since 2013/2014. The percentage of school leavers achieving 5 awards or more at level 5 or better has improved by 5.9% over the same period. When looking at the percentage of school leavers achieving 5 awards or more the gap has reduced by 4.9% since 2014/2015. Young people in deprived areas are now more likely to achieve 5 awards at SCQF level 5 with the Local Authority now ranked 24th, a slight improvement from last year. Young people in deprived areas are now more likely to achieve 5 awards at SCQF level 6 with the Local Authority now ranked 22nd compared with the ranking of 26th from last session.

The number of young people achieving across all quintiles has improved with the Local Authority now ranked 23rd (as opposed to 26th last year) for achieving 5 at SCQF Level 5, and 22nd for achieving 5 awards at SCQF level 6 (as opposed to 26th last year).

The Local Authority is currently graded 21st for average Tariff points (compared to 22nd last year) but there are significant anomalies when looking at achievements of learners living in different quintiles. Ranking range from 31 (for those living in Q3) to 23rd for those living in Q5. This is worthy of further analysis to identify and address the issue.

Data evidences a need to understand and address levels of performance in literacy and numeracy now that recruitment is less challenging in these areas, although there are still shortages in these key staff in our priority areas. The national research suggests that the periods of lockdown are more likely to negatively impact oral language development.

We continue to have uptake of Early Talkboost and Talkboost Training, which is a structured programme for children aged 3-7 with delayed language designed to boost children's progress in literacy and communication. We now need to better understand the issues to develop a more robust plan to address this area at the earliest opportunity.

The central team has established mechanisms to regularly review participation measures with a weekly review of exclusion and attendance data currently in place. This approach will help to review the impact of the new policy and also give an indication of the emotional and self-regulation needs of children and young people to inform service planning. This may lead to further targeted improvement work being undertaken in this area.

The lack of a complete data set for senior phase data has been an issue and work with Data and Insight to use Power BI to explore data at individual, class, school and locality level will help us transform our use of data to drive improvement by helping identify issues more quickly so that remedial action can be taken. This critical work will ensure that we are no longer waiting for the publication of historical attainment data to measure success and will help us transform our practices.

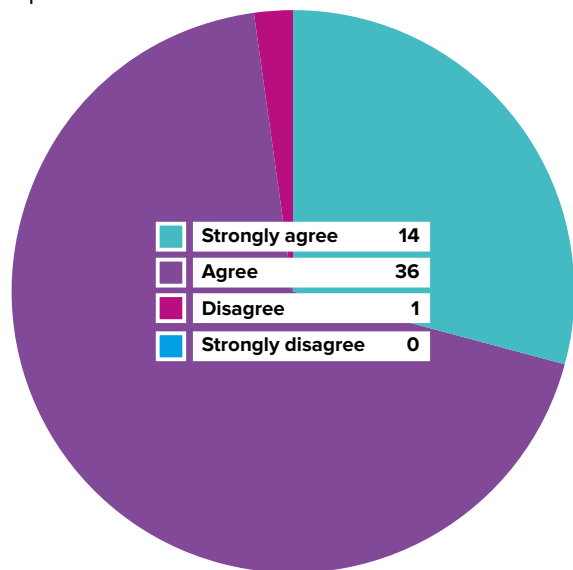




It is imperative that we continue to re-set our senior phase curriculum to ensure that we prepare our young people for changed opportunities post school. Ongoing consideration of delivery models for the City Campus and consortium arrangements which take account of the greater learner agency evident as a result of the periods of remote learning will be required.

Almost all senior leaders agree that our use of data has improved.

The pandemic has shone a sharp focus on the need to look at data sets across a partnership to understand the needs of families fully. Work to join up data sets will continue to be a key priority for the service and work to ensure that all staff across the service understand how performance data pertaining their pupils feeds into performance data at department, school and Local Authority level.



c) **WORKFORCE**

Addressing levels of vacancy

Over the last 5 years vacancy across primary and secondary schools has averaged around 100 teachers with resultant impacts on quality evident in some areas of the curriculum. The impact of this shortfall is apparent in literacy and numeracy trend data.

As a result of close working with colleagues in People and Organisation to refresh approaches to recruitment, the Local Authority began session 21/22 with all primary teaching posts filled and only a small number of secondary school vacancies in some hard to fill subject areas.

In 2018 we were aware of the potential shortage of highly qualified staff required to deliver on the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare. In collaboration with People and Organisation a range of approaches to recruitment were driven forward, including an in-house training programme for 90 ACC staff. This proactive approach and the recruitment to new posts in ELC established a clear progression pathway and has helped address the shortfall in staffing.

The work of the service and that of other functions has been highly effective in workforce planning and for the most part, work in this area will now be maintained. The single exception to this, is consideration of how to recruit/provide a curriculum in some hard to fill secondary subject areas where remote delivery or alternative delivery models may be advantageous.

Building leadership capacity

Leadership development and professional learning have been key tenets of our work over the last 2 years. A wider range of pathways to leadership are now available within classrooms, school, ELC settings and across the local and national system. Opportunities are varied and are greatly enhanced by school leaders developing and leading programmes too. Despite the challenges of the past year, engagement with certificated Leadership development opportunities has increased with almost all completing these successfully and achieving high pass rates. Interest in this area continues to increase.

The approach taken has helped grow leadership capacity and reduce vacant leadership posts. Over each of the last 4 years up to a third of city primary schools have been led by Acting Head Teachers due to the limited number of quality applicants for leadership positions. This position has now considerably changed with a high number of internal and external applications received for both senior and middle leadership positions. All schools began session 21/22 with a permanent HT having been appointed and we can see the early positive impact of new school leaders.

Approaches to developing leadership capacity have been highly effective. Leadership will remain a key tenet of our work but now be maintained in our, 'business as usual' with no further improvement work thought necessary at this point. Ongoing dialogue and review of data will ensure that the offer remains suited to the needs and vulnerabilities of the service, but this ongoing review and routine re-set are now embedded in established systems and working practices.

Building capacity and capability across the system

Professional learning opportunities are now fully aligned with the ACC capability framework and Learning Academy and comprise a more targeted mix of national, regional/local offers and supportive groups led by skilled senior leaders. There are clear indicators that this approach is building a more sustainable system and developing shared standards. Developing a structure which supports self-directed learning also provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage in professional development which suits their individual needs. All self-directed opportunities are shared through the ISEE Framework, allowing practitioners to select the appropriate professional learning at Informed, Skilled, Enhanced or Expert Level. In offering this model we are building capacity and professional agency and clear progression pathways for all.

The Professional Learning offer for ELC provides a combination of accessible and flexible online materials that can be accessed independently/as a staff team via the ACC Learn portal, with virtual sessions delivered termly via Microsoft Teams. The materials include continuous reflective questions, prompts for further development and opportunities to link with other teams in the locality via the online discussion boards. Staff are encouraged to link with their Locality Lead Officer and reflect on their improvement plans and engage with content appropriate for their service development so that Locality Leads can tailor content to the needs of a locality.

Feedback regarding the professional learning sessions and activities on offer has been positive, detailing the benefits of ready access to a range of activities in one comprehensive resource. Staff report that the more targeted offer is better meeting their professional learning needs and appreciate the investment in high quality learning opportunities. Moving forward, evaluative measurement tools and digital collaboration spaces will be built into self-directed activities to further track and monitor impact and garner feedback for improvement. The return of in-school quality assurance visits will also help better triangulate impact data and inform offers. It will be important to carefully consider any new educational paradigms which may require additional knowledge, understanding and skills from our workforce as we move forward, but current systems are thought appropriate to ensure that our offer remains current and future focussed. This area will be maintained and closely monitored with careful attention given to the extent to which distributed leadership helps build capacity for improvement.



d) THE ROLE OF DIGITAL WITHIN THE SERVICE

The use of Microsoft tools was in the early stages of adoption as we headed into the first period of lockdown. Use of Teams for collaboration and video calling was limited and not used consistently across the service. The service had started to take advantage of the Microsoft tools and had developed an Education SharePoint site to allow sharing of frameworks, updates and professional learning opportunities with all education staff.

We were fortunate that the use of Google Classroom and other Google tools to support Learning and Teaching was already in place at the start of the lockdown period. In some schools and departments it was already well embedded and supported by a train the trainer programme and Google Educator Certification for staff, although levels of confidence were not consistent.

Section 2 – How the Education Service responded to the pandemic and building back better

a) THE EDUCATION SERVICE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic brought a range of challenges and opportunities to the Education Service. The unparalleled circumstances provided an opportunity to think more creatively around potential solutions without the constraints of what had always been. In real terms, this saw a huge acceleration of progress in some areas and some rapid escalations of needs which had to be prioritised for action.

How well placed was the service to respond to the pandemic?

Business continuity plans had been refreshed at the beginning of session 2019, although these didn't include the detail required to respond to the unparalleled situation we faced from February 2020. The establishment of emergency response arrangements across the Local Authority provided a means of the central team beginning the process of parallel planning to ensure readiness for any eventuality. The very regular access to Chief Officers enabled the Chief Education Officer to share thinking and learn from others across the organisation which supported stronger decision making.

The service sought support from school leaders to implement a range of actions at pace to ensure readiness for implementing a new operating model. Although this initial command and control approach was at odds with the culture fostered across the service, it was highly effective in supporting our immediate emergency response and staff worked tirelessly to ensure adequate preparation. Knowing that schools were well placed to implement change allowed the service time to predict the need for emergency childcare and undertake the preparatory work that supported delivery of an operational childcare service from the first day of Lockdown. Over 1000 families were supported during the first period of lockdown thanks to the flexibility of childcare and school staff.

The Education Service National Improvement Framework Plan of 2020/2021 reflected the dynamic working environment and associated national guidance. A themed approach to planning enabled the service to plan our immediate response around 5 key areas which were considered to be most important to realise a strong response: workforce, wellbeing of all, curriculum, the physical return and finance and equity. Each theme was driven and overseen by a Quality Improvement Manager (QIM) to maximise the impact of the Education Management Structure. Each QIM worked closely with key internal and external partners whose support and expertise in aiding and enabling the service cannot be overstated.

The structure and 5 themes provided sufficient flexibility to respond to the rapidly changing needs of all stakeholders and supported planning and delivery of the range of operating models required over the academic session. The service kept a keen eye on possible future scenarios resulting in routine parallel planning being undertaken over the year. This approach aided our ability to predict and be well prepared. This agility will be an on-going feature of our 'business as usual' with some software solutions being investigated to support our scenario planning.

Covid-19 Health and safety compliance

Responding to a pandemic brought the need for confident risk assessment into sharp focus. School leaders effectively led teams to review approaches in keeping with national guidance to ensure that practice helped mitigate risk. School staff report that sufficient and helpful local guidance was made available to support in school planning. The strength of the control measures in City schools are frequently commended by Public Health and were endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive.

The service is very grateful for the excellent support afforded to them by the Corporate Health and Safety team and this close working relationship will be maintained. The pandemic cemented and improved the relationship with a number of teams across the organisation as our co-dependency in crisis became apparent. School leaders now report greater confidence in risk assessment practices. Progress in this area has been accelerated and will now be maintained.

Covid-19 Workforce Planning

The service worked well with People and Organisation to establish effective systems to gather workforce data and this enabled the service to undertake effective contingency planning. The standard use of Core HR has enabled consistent reporting to Scottish Government, information sharing and proactive planning.

The use of Microsoft forms and Power BI has enabled the service to capture real time data following each incident of Covid-19 in schools. Analysis of the data has helped share best practice and strengthen control measures to mitigate risks to the workforce and stakeholders. This invaluable use of real time data will continue to be embedded in our 'business as usual'. Both approaches have helped prevent any risk to school operations due to insufficient staffing and led to an acceleration of the adoption of Core HR as a tool to support workforce planning.

A need to be more sophisticated with data

The service was able to remain agile and responsive by making improved use of live data across all operations of the service. Close working with colleagues in Data and Insights enabled the service to collect and digest large amounts of data with ease. This approach enabled the service to predict demand whilst evaluating the impact of the Covid-19 controls in place.

The use of live data has transformed the work of the Education Service and progress has been rapid. This agile approach in response to live data has accelerated our approach to continuous improvement, transformed working practices and will be the backbone of our approach to continuous improvement as we move forward.

b) ACCELERATING OUR USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The first period of school closure in March saw a rapid review of our approach to communication and engagement with school leaders. The service moved from regular e-mail updates and face to face meetings with senior leaders to the use of HT Teams site. Staff report more timely responses to queries. There is now a need to agree where to hold information so that everyone can access information timeously. There is growing evidence of colleagues sharing expertise and collaborating to maximise the impact of our collective endeavours by establishing Teams sites for colleagues with particular roles and responsibilities. The pandemic significantly accelerated levels of adoption of Teams.

Secondary school leaders have admirably led their school communities through uncertainty around SQA validation practices and have kept provisional plans under review. Colleagues have taken advantage of Power BI to support moderation practices and we will build on the use of this App more widely as we move forward. A recent HMIE Thematic Review highlighted communication as a key strength.

Officers will now move ahead with plans to offer bespoke support to each school to ensure that the technology is being fully harnessed to support school improvement and teacher agency.

Digital delivery of the curriculum

Schools effectively used Google Classroom to deliver remote learning and teaching. Staff expertise increased significantly during lockdown and enabled the delivery of a strong remote learning offer. High numbers of staff accessed Google Educator Training at differing levels of complexity. Data shows that 93% of learners engaged with the digital offer during the first period of lockdown with 97% engaging through a further improved offer during the second period of school closure. Good use of lead in time to the second period of lockdown saw many staff re-engage with Google Educator training and the quality of remote offer has been improved as a result. The programme of Google Educator training will be maintained. Our repeated Learning at Distance survey highlighted that there has been a 9% increase (87% of staff who responded) in the number of staff reporting confidence in delivering remotely. This evidences that approaches to empowering staff has been effective. This is clear when reviewing Google Analytics data too. Schools now make improved use of Google Analytics to support quality improvement.

89% of staff reported that they have access to the guidance they require to deliver a curriculum remotely. This is an increase of nearly 5% from the 2020 survey. Most staff found the ACC developed guidance more helpful than nationally produced documents.

There has been a marginal increase in the number of children who report they feel safe on-line (92.5% in February 2021 compared to 92.25% in March 2020) but also a similar increase in those disagreeing with the statement. The reduction in the number stating that they don't know is possibly an indication of there being greater awareness of on-line risks. This area will continue to be monitored with Community Planning Partners and supported through the roll out of the Safer School App.

There has been a 0.59% reduction in the number of children and young people agreeing that other learners show kindness on-line and an increase in the number who strongly disagree. The high continued proportion of returns who report 'not knowing' if other learners are kind is of concern to the service and will be an area for further focus as we further develop PSHE programmes in the short and longer term.

The digital divide was clear over the first period of lockdown and over 5000 chromebooks were issued to families. The Council responded positively and continued to invest heavily in the provision of chromebooks. Over 12,000 devices were issued to children and young people over the second period of school closure and we continue to work with Digital and Technology to improve the digital experience for pupils, staff and parents.



A Northern Alliance funded DHT (digital) has been appointed to support work with the Northern Alliance and e-Sgoil to increase the digital offer for learners in the senior phase. Main grade staff trained as Google educators continue to develop webinars and offer one-to-one sessions to support staff development and new Apps are shared routinely with staff. This personalised approach has been well received and enables the local authority to further develop capacity for improvement. This model of support will be extended to other fields where possible.

The service has benefited from the extensive adoption of tools into our 'business as usual' including the use of Microsoft Forms, Power BI, Teams and One Note. The service is now engaging with Microsoft to help take our use of digital to the next level. Microsoft brings a wealth of resource from across the world to help shape our innovative future.

Our programme, Education Navigator, is harnessing the wealth of best digital practice from across the world with Microsoft Educational experts. We are also taking a collaborative approach with our local partners within colleges and universities to align our future plans and ensure the education journey of our young people continues in a cohesive manner, no matter where their learning takes place. As an authority we have already laid the foundations for digital transformation, but recognise that we need to go much further if we are to help our young people realise their full potential. Digital skills are identified as a key priority for all young people as they move into adulthood.

The Navigator programme is fundamentally about digital transformation within our learning environments and maximising the tools and intelligence we can gather to achieve the best outcomes. There are 4 core themes:

1. Leadership & Policy
2. Intelligent Environments
3. Teaching & Learning
4. Student & School Success

Digital infrastructure

The digital infrastructure supporting our schools has some vulnerabilities. Feedback from all Head Teachers on current challenges highlighted poor connectivity as the single dominant issue. During the last 2 years there has been significant investment in chromebooks to support teaching and learning. We currently provide all learners in the senior phase, learners in P6 and P7 and all vulnerable learners with a personal device. As we continue to deploy devices the issue around connectivity will worsen, but we will continue to work towards every child having their own device in order to ensure that we are well placed to maximise our use of technology in the future. This has been highlighted as a priority area and investment has been planned in the current work for the Transformation Board.

Every learner who requested a device to support remote learning received one and this is evidenced through the levels of engagement with Google Classroom helping to build learner agency.



c) **RETHINKING THE CURRICULUM**

Over the course of the pandemic the focus for learning has been on health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. Schools were provided with scaffolds to support active collaboration within and across schools. School leaders shared practice on Interdisciplinary Learning which was recognised as best practice and shared nationally. Discussions to this point have been largely limited to those in the central team and in senior leadership positions and this should now be extended to include the whole system.

Central Officers and school leaders collaborated to provide guidance to colleagues on how to create and manage trauma informed classrooms whilst working remotely. This document was well received and influenced practice across the city.

The pandemic provided an opportunity to rethink and re-prioritise curriculum delivery and the service will now consider longer term planning around the entitlements and principles of Curriculum for Excellence as we move further through the recovery stage of the pandemic. There are various considerations including the report from the International Council of Education Advisors which will help shape longer term plans. In the immediate term we will consider the extent to which digital can support delivering of the curriculum as children and young people re-enter school buildings and how we maintain and promote the use of outdoor learning as well as being involved in the debate around different assessment models in the short and longer term



Covid-19 impacting on Growth Areas

Over 2020/2021 the Education Service spent time reviewing the senior phase offer to determine how best to improve attainment, achievement and positive destinations. The pandemic, the downturn in Oil and Gas and Brexit are all likely to impact on the opportunities available to our children and young people the situation remains highly dynamic.

The most recent data produced by Skills Development Scotland indicates that within Aberdeen City the labour market is forecast to face challenges in the immediate term. The data suggests that within the region job losses are likely to have occurred in hospitality and engineering. The most recent jobs postings indicate that Nurses, Care Workers and Home Carers and Sales Occupations are the most numerous.

Employers within the region are seeking softer skills as well as technical skills, skills such as teamwork/ collaboration and customer service feature, as do job specific skills such as budgeting, teaching and sales. COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of digital skills due to the uptake of homeworking and this is an area that will likely extend beyond COVID-19 and bring a number of societal and economic benefits to the region to reduce the carbon footprint.

The forecasts for the short term (2020-2023) suggest that there will be some job growth and opportunities created as of the need to replace workers. The greatest requirement for workers is expected to be in Human Health activities, Retail Trade and Education including Child Care.

Over the longer term (2023-2030) the Aberdeen city labour market is forecast to contract, but despite this the occupations to have greatest growth due to new job creation are Health and Social Care Professionals, Digital and Green Energy, Accommodation and Food services.

Skills Development Scotland continue to work in partnership with schools in providing Labour Market Information to inform schools of the growth job areas and to develop flexibility in the senior phase for young people to explore diverse pathways supported by taster courses and generic skills courses.

The on-going development of a central portal with current information for all stakeholders will continue to progress at pace as well as work to finalise a skills progression reflective of the current state to help guide young people into an appropriate learning pathway. Young people continue to be anxious and there are indications that we could see an additional 1000 young people who may have previously left school choose to stay on. It is imperative that we clarify the pathways available to support decision making and ensure we look at how the broad general education can best prepare our young people for the senior phase.

d) WHAT ARE THE 'GAPS' POST PANDEMIC?

Addressing food insecurity

The Community Planning Partnership effectively and swiftly joined forces to address food insecurity from March 2020. This saw partners come together to ensure that the provision of free school meals was considered within the wider context of support for families. Close collaborative working has continued over the course of the pandemic.

Research papers highlight the need to join up data sets and to wrap partners around children, young people and families and the work of the Aberdeen Together Group to collaborate to address food poverty has stood the service in good stead to continue to meet the needs of families. Hubs established over the first period of Lockdown provided food parcels and many schools serving areas of deprivation offer a food parcel service in collaboration with the Third Sector.

Local data on FSM registrations give a clear indication of the number of families with changed financial circumstances. The spread of free school meals is no longer focussed around the three priority areas, triggering a need to rethink approaches and consideration of the establishment of Food Pantries in each locality.

Given the economic impact of the pandemic on families it is of critical importance that we ensure that no costs are passed to any parent for the provision of education and consider how financial services can be better advertised or accessed through school communities. This work will be a key area of focus for the service.



Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families

Despite work to support positive health and wellbeing pre-pandemic, the crisis brought a need to accelerate the establishment of a systematic approach to Health & Wellbeing. As we entered the first lockdown period all schools identified how best to support children and young people deemed to be more vulnerable and made arrangements to keep in touch with families. Arrangements have continued to be developed and adapted based on feedback from families.

The Mental Health Foundation for Scotland reviewed the **Mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland on vulnerable groups**. Findings from this report included:

- A person-centred approach must be taken in understanding experiences, one which recognises the diversity of individual lived experience, rather than attempting to reduce each group into a single homogenous unit captured by terms such as 'shielding'.
- Many healthy coping mechanisms reported by the Scottish population were linked to outdoor activities and access to green space.
- Contact with friends and family and community support was vital for sustaining wellbeing with huge appreciation for the speed at which local organisations responded and adapted to the pandemic.

Within Aberdeen, we recognise many of these factors within our own professional and personal lives seeing a negative spiral of mental wellbeing across our schools and communities. The below report confirms this is a similar picture across Scotland and action must be taken to address it immediately.

Mental wellbeing has been a significant focus over the past year and the declining mental health of all has been recognised. **'Good Mental Health for All'** recognises the benefits of improving mental health which link with positive health and social outcomes for individuals and the broader community. Those who have positive mental and emotional wellbeing are more likely to have success within their lives.

We have worked with an external partner to develop and launch **The Resilience Alphabet** and **The Journey** to quickly establish a universal approach to building resilience in children and young people through the first period of lockdown.

Over 88% of children and young people who responded to our Learning at a Distance survey in March 2021 knew who to contact if they are upset and worried and this is a positive and improved picture from a similar survey undertaken in 2020. There has been a slight decline in the number disagreeing with the statement. A reduction in those who were not able to offer an opinion stating that they, 'don't know' has also reduced. There is undoubtedly a need to re-establish relationships to support wellbeing.

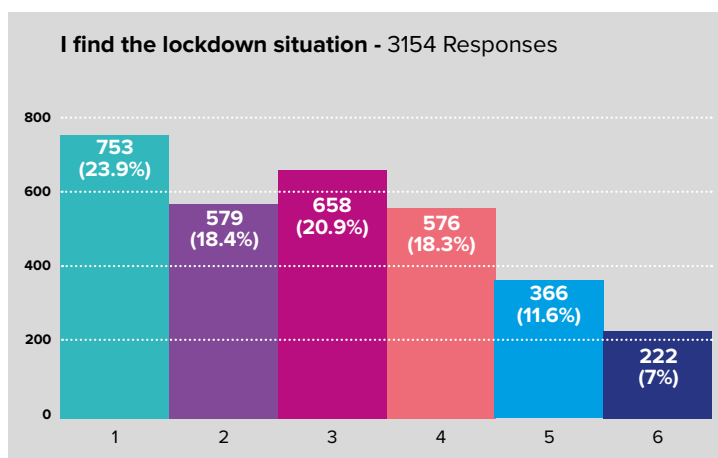
The survey also showed a significant reduction (14.6%) in the number of learners feeling confident in learning remotely (76.71% in 2020 and 62.14% in February 2021). It is thought that this is partially attributable to the timing of the survey and increasing levels of concern and anxiety felt by students in the senior phase. Further exploration of the data shows that 41% of those who strongly disagreed are in the senior phase, 37% in the S1-3 and the remaining 19% in primary schools further illustrating the level of anxiety present in older students. The service continues to provide as much certainty around certification arrangements as possible to address this.

23% less children and young people now report that they are enjoying distance learning now that we are a year on. This trend is strongly mirrored in responses by parents and carers. The more positive responses in 2020 could have reflected the novelty of a new operating environment but it is now clear that young people need to reconnect with friends in school.

Children and young people were asked to consider how they were finding this most recent period of lockdown on a sliding scale from 1 (difficult) to 6 (easy). 63.2% gave a negative response with 754 choosing the lowest possible grading.

Children and young people were also asked about their experience of managing school and home life. Responses were more evenly balanced with the majority (52%) providing a negative response. It is of critical importance that we fully understand and address the mental wellbeing of our children and young people.

Children have the right to play and learn, the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life.



Being outdoors has a positive impact on adults as well as children. **Out to Play – creating outdoor play experiences for children: practical guidance** suggests that there is strong and compelling evidence that playing and learning outdoors has many benefits for children. By focusing on this evidence and the impact for all, taking learning outside will build a stronger, more resilient learning community within Aberdeen.

Learning from one another and in partnership with Education Scotland we have identified an approach to supporting and developing community wellbeing which will strengthen our universal offer. Through the Compassionate and Connected Communities programme we have been able to develop a Train the Trainer model which over time should provide more consistent language and understanding within Aberdeen and support us in developing a more nurturing city.

Engagement with **SHINE** (Schools Health & Wellbeing Improvement Research Network) has helped schools prepare longer term interventions. SHINE provide regular Mental Health & Wellbeing Surveys and associated reports to enable schools more readily to understand and support the needs of young people within their individual settings. From this work we now hope to develop a system wide overview of data to help us meet the mental health needs of our children and young people.

As we respond to the high levels of distress and anxiety exhibited by some children and young people who have experienced significant change, school staff continue to undertake Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) training and work with our Educational Psychology Team has supported wider mindfulness and resilience building. Two of our Secondary Schools will participate in Distress Brief Intervention Training in partnership with Penumbra and the University of Glasgow and this may be extended further if successful.

The lack of opportunity for face to face socialisation is impacting children and young people and it will be imperative that we continue to work with community planning partners to explore how best to provide safe opportunities in the immediate and longer term.

Close working with Community Planning Partners around the mental health agenda is critical. The mental health of families is likely to be considerably impacted by changes in economic circumstances and this will undoubtedly impact on children and young people. Ensuring easy access to employment support and financial inclusion services will be critical to support family wellbeing and the Education Service is working with others to explore models for the co-location of multi-disciplinary teams through the ELC Links Hub.

There is a growing body of evidence that children, young people and families have been less active during the second period of lockdown and that proactive planning will be required to address this area proactively. **‘Let’s Get Physical’** written by the Mental Health Foundation, highlights the benefits of physical activity on wellbeing. Research has shown that physical activity releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good – boosting your self-esteem, helping you concentrate as well as sleep, look and feel better.

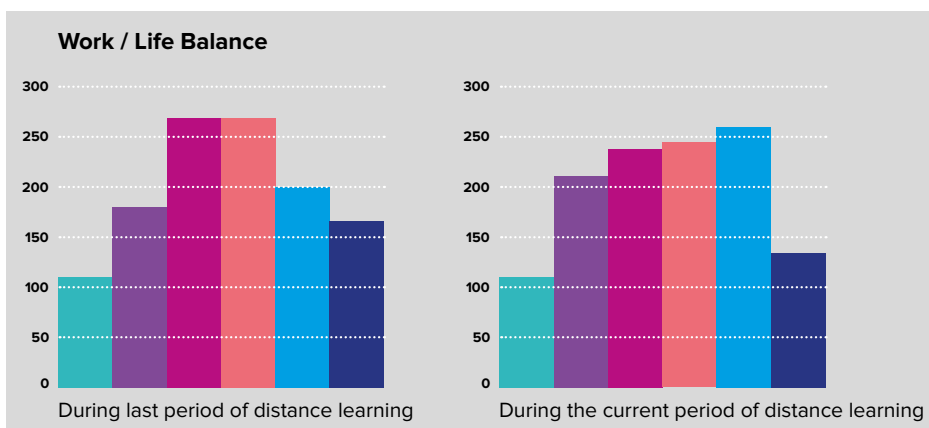
The limitations on the delivery of Physical Education place further pressure on this area. Many secondary schools have introduced staff v pupil running challenges in order to help address this area. Physical health will continue to be an important area of focus as we move forward.

Supporting the health and wellbeing of staff

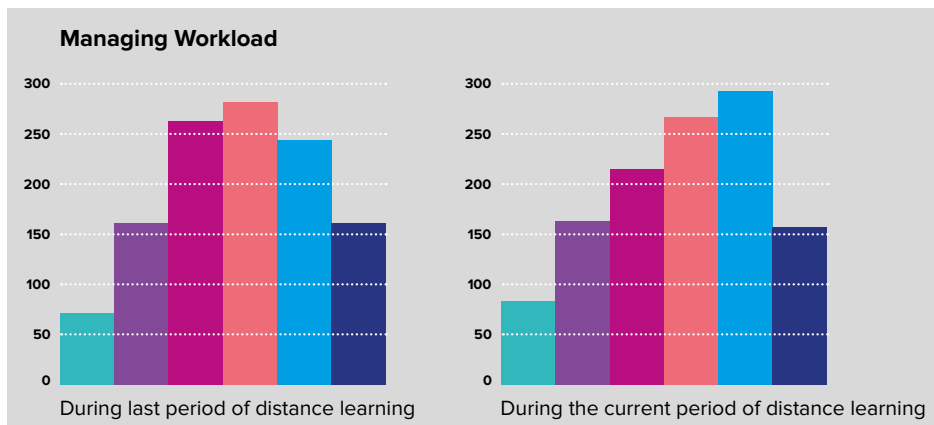
A range of approaches have been used to support staff wellbeing including the establishment of staff wellbeing sessions, peer support networks and wellbeing sessions for senior leaders. Initiatives such as Wellbeing Wednesdays have supported both learners and staff. The pressures on staff and learners have changed over time and the service remains agile and responsive. Resource within the central team has been allocated to this area to ensure that we can proactively respond.

In 2020 just under 95% of staff felt well supported to work remotely. This has dipped by 2% in 2021 but indicates that staff feel supported despite us being a year into the pandemic. This would suggest that approaches have been largely effective with staff reporting that they are more aware of opportunities available to them.

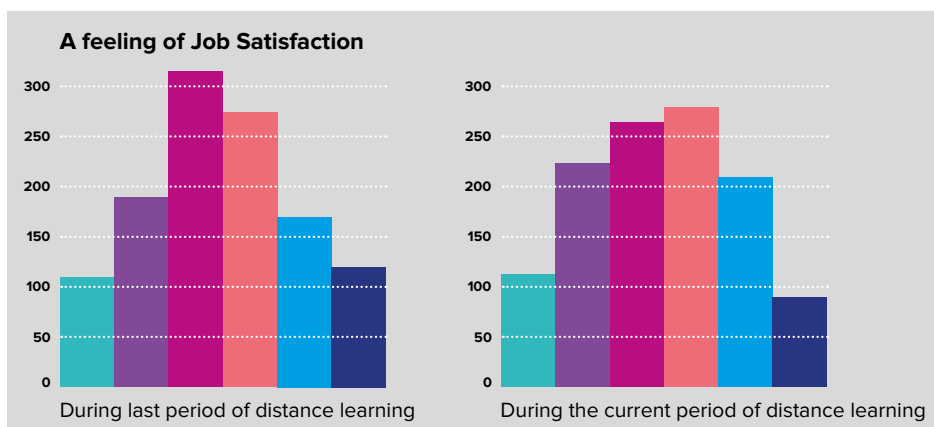
Staff are reporting that it is harder to separate school life from home life.



Staff are also finding it harder to manage workload.



Staff are placing very high expectations on their own performance and these aspirations are becoming harder to reach. However, job satisfaction has increased.



The wellbeing of staff will continue to be a significant priority for the service in collaboration with others. It is clear that a focus on the mental, emotional and physical health of all will be critical.

Loss of learning

Children and young people have engaged positively with their Google Classrooms and operating models are now allowing more frequent engagement with the small number of young people who are proving harder to reach. Our children and young people will return to school buildings with a range of skills they didn't develop prior to the lockdown period including increased learner agency. As children return to in school learning we will be able to assess the growth and gaps in children and young people and will work as a service to address any concerns whilst ensuring that we build upon the greater learner efficacy evident in learners.



d) WORKING MORE CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERS

The first period of lockdown saw the establishment of wellbeing hubs which provided an invaluable means of supporting the wellbeing of some of our most vulnerable learners. Qualitative and quantitative data evidenced the positive impact of this multi-agency approach on families and the service has worked with partners to ensure their longevity through the establishment of three Fit Like Hubs. The provision of hubs combining education, social work, health, community, and social resources working effectively together has provided a more holistic model for families.

The Fit Like Hubs are underpinned by embracing a children's rights approach. Active and meaningful communication and engagement between all stakeholders will continue to be essential in enabling the realisation of our agreed aims to:

- strengthen our preventative work to support family wellbeing at the universal level;
- improve awareness of mental health and wellbeing in order to address stigma and help address any cultural issues;
- build the capacity of the workforce through professional learning and a clarification of roles and responsibilities; and
- improve knowledge and communication of the continuum of mental health services.
- careful tracking of data to help adapt services in order to ensure timely access to the right support
- co-locate in multi-agency local hubs to support closer collaboration and encourage skills sharing and supporting professional development across disciplines.

This model aims to help individuals and families to set their own goals and take part in relationships and activities that are meaningful. The implementation of the Hubs and broader health and wellbeing continuum will be closely monitored to ensure that they meet the emotional and mental health needs of our children and young people.

Research suggests that the number of children identified as 'vulnerable' could increase by 20% and this will impact on all Community Planning Partners and close collaborative working to support families will be critical. The early establishment of the Fit Like Hubs, re-design of ASN services and response to 'The Promise' will be a key part of our approach to meet increased demand.

There is an on-going need to strengthen relationships across the partnership so that we can work with others to meet the demands of the next phase of recovery. This will take the expertise of all partners and we would anticipate establishing new partnerships (for example with Higher education) to tap into resource and expertise across the wider system.

Planning the Implementation of ‘The Promise’ and Children’s Rights

Over the last 10 years partners have agreed, implemented and refined processes associated with GIRFEC policy to support children who require support beyond the universal services. The local system is likely to experience increased demand as a result of the pandemic and we need to work as a Community Planning Partnership to get ahead of this challenge.

The Independent Care Review’s Promise highlights *‘that Scotland must not aim to fix a broken system but set a higher collective ambition that enables loving, supportive and nurturing relationships as a basis on which to thrive’*.

This work dovetails with Angela Morgan’s review which stated that, *‘30.9% of a population is not marginal. The evidence is that fulfilling the vision of the Additional Support for Learning legislation through “tweaking” systems and provision around a baseline assumption of educating children who may have support needs, but not “additional” support needs is not workable. We need a different starting point: all our children and all their support needs.’*

A key focus on quality improvement activity in 2021/2022 will be the extent to which the Children’s Rights aspirations of The Promise and findings of Angela Morgan’s review are informing practice in schools and this work will inform our service response.

The Community Planning Partnership has committed to considering the structures required to enable a collective and rapid response to changing needs in order to prevent services from being overwhelmed with demand over the coming months and years and the Children’s Services Board will drive the following programmes of work:

- Primary prevention and early intervention
- Shared spaces and resources
- Shared thresholds, systems and customer access routes
- Improve whole life support and learning for life

As we look forward to the re-building phase it will be important to be less defined by job role and employer and build a stronger sense of the team around the child and family. There is also a need to ensure that all children have equal access to education and continue to monitor data on a weekly basis to help drive down levels of exclusion.



e) EMPOWERING AND SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS

COVID 19 has brought the engagement and involvement of parents supporting their children at home into sharp focus; most particularly the need to improve access to digital technology and connectivity, support for family health and wellbeing and strengthening parents' ability to support learning at home whilst in lockdown and beyond.

Microsoft SWAY has been successfully used to share our monthly online newsletter highlighting developments with parents and carers. This approach allows us to share learning from surveys and inform contributors of our next steps which has helped increase . Engagement with parent newsletters has been positive with our most recent newsletter reaching over 10,000 readers. Feedback through the Aberdeen City Council Parent Forum (ACPF) has been positive, as have the updates from Central Officers during monthly ACPF meetings which provide an opportunity for updates and direct support and guidance for parents.

The Educational Psychology Service has developed a number of resources which include themes such as bereavement support, managing behaviour and transition between home and school learning, practical ideas and considerations for wellbeing and training for staff. **The digital hub** was developed to host this and to provide focused information which offers support to all stakeholders.

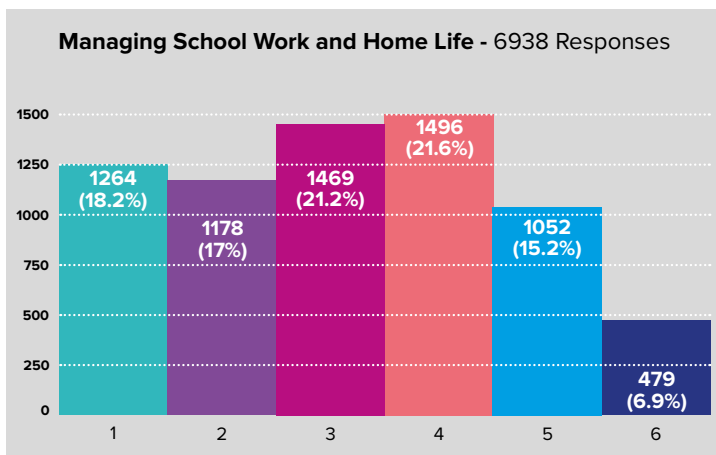
The learning of the last year has reinforced the importance and value of working together with parents to support children's learning – particularly around learning at home. A new digital **Parent Hub** was specifically designed to encourage and build parent's confidence and knowledge in supporting learning at home and to provide tips, links and ideas for learning, supporting parenting and family wellbeing. Learning from the most recent Learning at a Distance survey suggests that it is time to review these resources with parents and carers to ensure that they offer the support families will need as children return to school buildings.

All schools effectively ran virtual parents' evenings with many benefiting from the use of parent evening booking system (PEBs). Schools set up timetables for parent appointments, allowing families to select their own appointment based on availability. Feedback from staff and parents was positive with many families preferring the virtual meeting. The service will carefully consider our approaches as we move forward and not presume that things should return to pre-pandemic practices.

Google Guardian sessions were offered in almost all schools as well as opportunities for families to become familiar with Google Classroom. As families become more comfortable with the tools available some schools worked with partners to provide support for families such as Heathryburn School's collaboration with the Family Learning Team to provide, 'Canna Dine Oot' sessions. Many schools also took advantage of the ThingLink App to help parents directly influence the learning being offered remotely and this more collaborative approach was welcomed by families. The success of these approaches will be considered as we developed a refreshed Parental Engagement Plan.

Of the 6938 parents and carers who responded to a recent Learning at a Distance survey only 48% reported that their child enjoys distance learning (compared to 61% of learners). 66% of parents report that their child undertakes learning with confidence showing that confidence levels have reduced from the first period of lockdown. Confidence levels being reported by children and young people are broadly in keeping with those reported by parents and carers suggesting that as more has been expected and more structure introduced to Google Classroom we have seen decreasing levels of confidence.

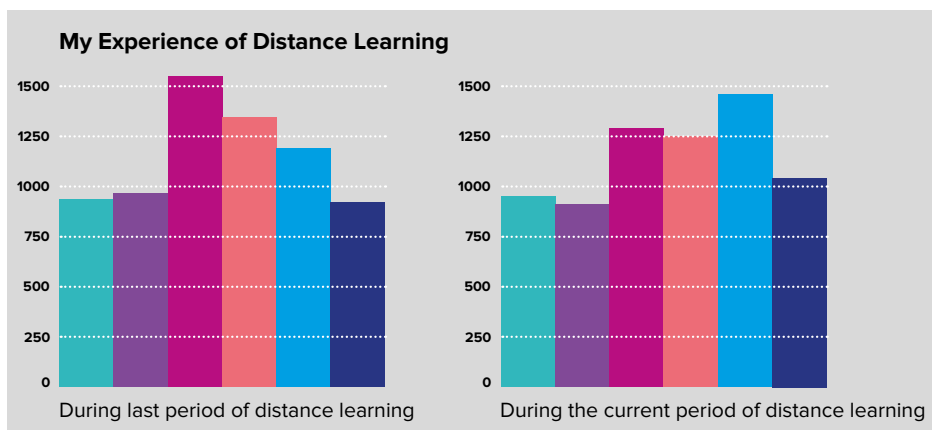
The majority of parents and carers report that they are finding balancing school work and home life difficult and much of the frustration being experienced by families is clear in the data. The pressure is felt more acutely by parents and carers than by children and young people and it will be important to work with Community Planning Partners to support families as we move out of the pandemic.



The refresh of the parental engagement plan is taking account of the very changed circumstances we all now face but will continue to focus on the key

themes of effective communication and information, learning (home, school and family learning), parental voice and further development to support parenting particularly around children’s health and wellbeing and learning.

Despite less families reporting that their child enjoys distance learning there is a positive shift in the quality values when comparing the experience of the first period of lockdown to the second. This feedback marries with Google Analytics data and helps evidence the increase in quality.



The number of parents who feel that the school has supported physical wellbeing (79%) is higher than those who feel that emotional wellbeing has been supported (57%). This chimes with other data sets from across the partnership and should be a clear and on-going focus for the service and wider partnership.

Parents as Early Education Partners (PEEP) will be made available to all families across the city from August and the service will carefully monitor the impact of this intervention. It is important that the service plays its part in the recovery of parents and carers and carefully considers the part it plays in Family Learning.

f) EMPOWERING AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our children and young people have shown incredible resilience over the last year. We are aware of the need to strongly support their health and wellbeing but need also to look at how they help us build a stronger and better system.

g) RECOVERING FROM COVID AND BUILDING BACK BETTER

Themes emerging for 2021/2022

The pandemic has impacted on the needs of children and families considerably and it is impossible to consider children in isolation from families and communities. The service has worked hard to understand and respond to these changing needs and will continue to be agile and respond to new learning.

Consideration of our progress over the last few years and reflection on our performance and learning from the last year has helped identify a number of priorities for action/improvement. The service intends to resist the desire to identify all of the solutions at this point in order to ensure that we continue to be guided by the data as we prioritise these areas for improvement over the next 12 months.

Cross cutting service improvements

- Build on the use of live data to diagnose and address vulnerability;
- Streamline improvement activity into one plan to improve monitoring arrangements;
- Further strengthen relationships across the Community Planning Partnership;
- Be future focused and work with Community Planning Partners to explore Community Campus models and new education paradigms;
- Work across the Community Planning Partnership to reshape wider children's services to address the changing needs of children, families and community in keeping with The Promise and ASN Review;

Raising attainment and achievement

- Improve connectivity to enable the exploration of new educational paradigms;
- Continue to address on-line safety;
- Further develop collaboration for improvement both at school senior leader level and below;
- Review the curriculum in light of the pandemic;
- Improve tracking and monitoring arrangements; and
- Improve the effectiveness of ASN services and accessibility in accordance with Supporting Learners, Accessibility Plan and Children's Rights.

- Empower schools to consider Children’s Rights in all areas of work;
- Further develop learner agency and pupil participation;
- Empower parents and carers through implementation of the Parental Engagement Plan;
- Improve the physical wellbeing of children and young people;
- Improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and families; and
- Reduce risk taking behaviour and poor self-regulation associated with experiences over the last 12 months; and
- Further monitor and support the positive wellbeing of staff.

Closing the gap

- Fully implement 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021 including the roll out of PEEP
- Improve attainment in literacy and address any gaps in core literacy skills;
- Improve attainment in numeracy and address any gaps in core numeracy skills;
- Work with internal and external partners on the development of a systemic approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty including the introduction of no costs to the school day; and
- Maximise the impact of Partnership Forums.

Improving employability

- Identify which hard to fill subject areas could be supported by a remote delivery or alternative delivery solution;
- Formalise a skills progression which takes account of growth areas;
- Improve tracking arrangements to inform the choices of young people and curricular offer;
- Work with partners to continue to re-set the senior phase offering in light of growth areas; and
- Improve visibility of growth areas and available learning pathways.

References

International Council of Education Advisors report Dec'20

National Improvement Framework Plan 2021

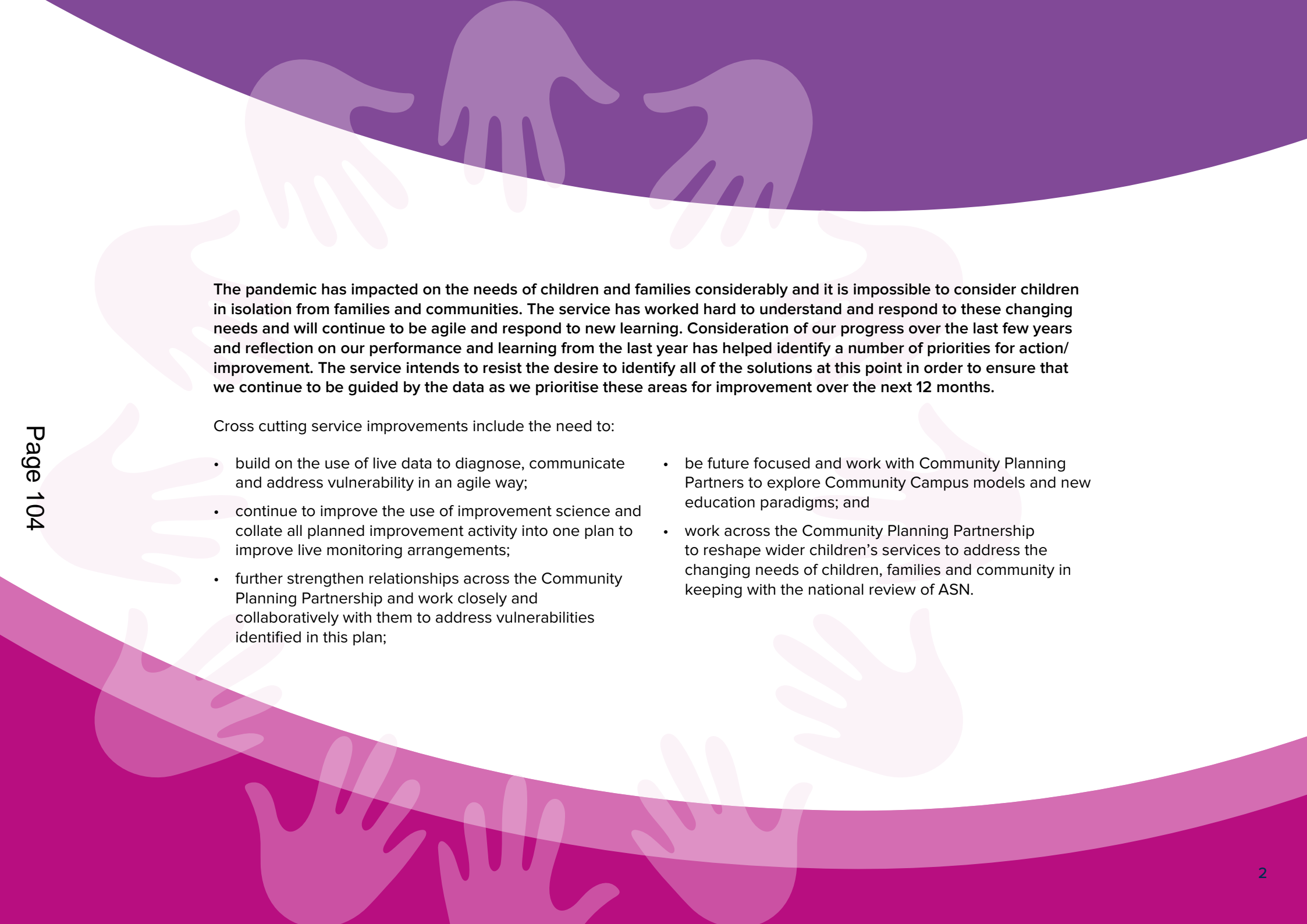




National Improvement Framework Plan

2021-2022

Proudly Working Together as One Team to Keep Children, Young People, Families and Communities Safe, Healthy and Thriving



The pandemic has impacted on the needs of children and families considerably and it is impossible to consider children in isolation from families and communities. The service has worked hard to understand and respond to these changing needs and will continue to be agile and respond to new learning. Consideration of our progress over the last few years and reflection on our performance and learning from the last year has helped identify a number of priorities for action/improvement. The service intends to resist the desire to identify all of the solutions at this point in order to ensure that we continue to be guided by the data as we prioritise these areas for improvement over the next 12 months.

Cross cutting service improvements include the need to:

- build on the use of live data to diagnose, communicate and address vulnerability in an agile way;
- continue to improve the use of improvement science and collate all planned improvement activity into one plan to improve live monitoring arrangements;
- further strengthen relationships across the Community Planning Partnership and work closely and collaboratively with them to address vulnerabilities identified in this plan;
- be future focused and work with Community Planning Partners to explore Community Campus models and new education paradigms; and
- work across the Community Planning Partnership to reshape wider children's services to address the changing needs of children, families and community in keeping with the national review of ASN.

Staff from across the Education Service have come together to agree key priorities for improvement session 2021/22. School Improvement Plans have informed and will be informed by our agreed priorities contained within this National Improvement Framework Plan.

Each Action Plan is driven and coordinated by Improvement Groups comprising school and central staff. Progress will be monitored on a monthly basis by both the central leadership team and head teachers to enable us to hold each other to account. A comprehensive suite of trend data will provide the service with real time data to support improved progress reporting to Committee.

▶ Raising attainment and achievement high level themes

- Improve connectivity to enable the exploration of new educational paradigms;
- Continue to address on-line safety;
- Further develop collaboration for improvement both at school senior leader level and below;
- Review the curriculum in light of the pandemic;
- Improve tracking and monitoring arrangements; and
- Improve the effectiveness of ASN services and accessibility in accordance with Supporting Learners, Accessibility Plan and Children’s Rights.

▶ Closing the Attainment Gap high level themes

- Fully implement 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021 including the roll out of PEEP;
- Improve attainment in literacy and address any gaps in core literacy skills;
- Improve attainment in numeracy and address any gaps in core numeracy skills;
- Work with internal and external partners on the development of a systemic approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty including the introduction of no costs to the school day; and
- Maximise the impact of Partnership Forums.

▶ Improving health and wellbeing high level themes

- Empower schools to consider Children’s Rights in all areas of work;
- Further develop learner agency and pupil participation;
- Empower parents and carers through implementation of the Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan;
- Improve the physical wellbeing of children and young people;
- Improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and families;
- Reduce risk taking behaviour and poor self-regulation associated with experiences over the last 12 months; and
- Further monitor and support the positive wellbeing of staff.

▶ Employability & Positive Destinations high level themes

- Identify which hard to fill subject areas could be supported by a remote delivery or alternative delivery solution;
- Formalise a skills progression which takes account of growth areas;
- Improve tracking arrangements to inform the choices of young people and curricular offer;
- Work with partners to continue to re-set the senior phase offering in light of growth areas; and
- Improve visibility of growth areas and available learning pathways.

Raising Attainment Action Plan

Raising Attainment - Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy



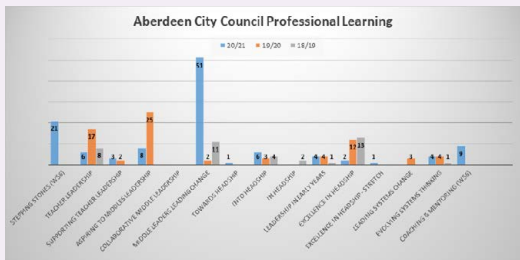
Improvement Outcomes <i>What do we hope to achieve?</i>	Measures of Success <i>How will we know this has been achieved? What evidence will we have?</i>	Data <i>Who is responsible for gathering data and at what points?</i>	Actions Required <i>What do we need to do and by when?</i>	Resources <i>Who and what is required? (including cost/fund)</i>
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School Leadership

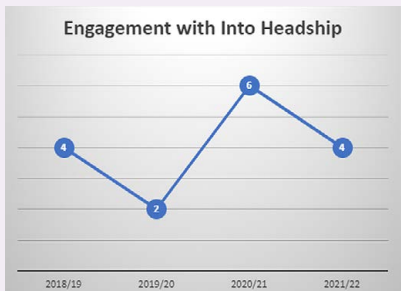
Improved partnership working, sharing of practice and learning from and with one another

20% improvement in school QI 1.3 Leadership of Change evaluations rated at Good or above.
 2018/19 - 54%
 2019/20 - 52%
 2020/21 - 58%
 2021/22 - 65%

5% increase in number of practitioners engaging in formal leadership development opportunities.
 2018/19 - 40 participants
 2019/20 - +75% (70 participants)
 2020/21 - +21% (85 participants)



Maintain levels of engagement with Into Headship Programme at 4 per year.



QIMs

Building Capacity/ Early Years through on-going tracking of uptake

Building Capacity in March 2022

- Further develop collaboration for improvement at practitioner, senior leader and across the partnership through improved use of Microsoft O365 - by June 2022


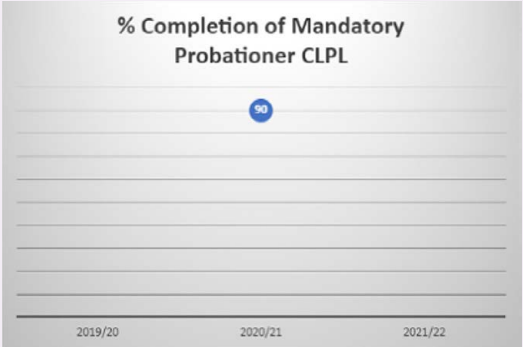
- Further develop mechanisms to improve our local 'supply chain' of school leaders by June 2022

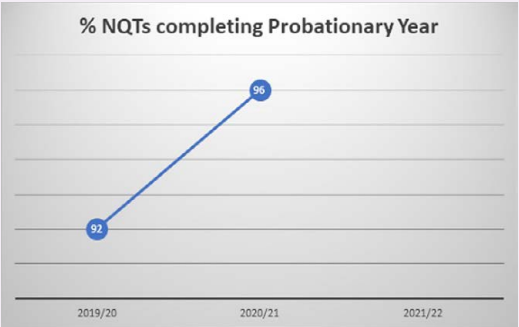
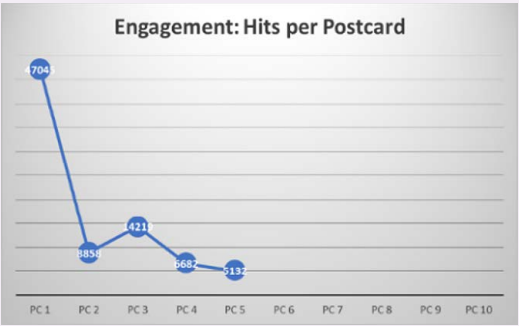
- Implementation of Stepping into Leadership Programme across ELC settings

Central and school senior and middle leader

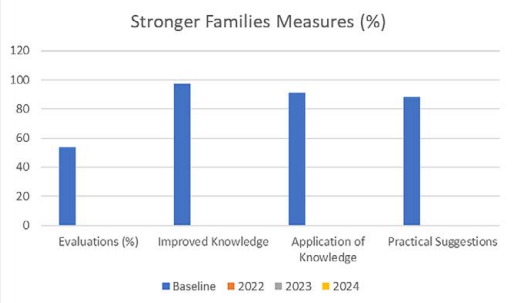
Building Capacity and HT

Locality Lead and Office 365

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources									
	<p>Increase % of school communities registered to use the Safer School App to 100%</p> <p>Increase % of learners who report feeling safe on-line from 92% to 95% by June 2022</p> <p>Increase % of learners who report other pupils are kind on-line from 88.2% to 92% by June 2022</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>% Learners Reporting Safety and Kindness Online</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Feeling Safe (%)</th> <th>Other Pupils Kind (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>92.2</td> <td>87.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>92.4</td> <td>88.1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Feeling Safe (%)	Other Pupils Kind (%)	2020	92.2	87.6	2021	92.4	88.1	<p>Raising Attainment through on-going monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to review and implement guidance in relation to digital/online safer and fully roll out the Safer School App 	<p>Raising Attainment and school staff</p>
Year	Feeling Safe (%)	Other Pupils Kind (%)											
2020	92.2	87.6											
2021	92.4	88.1											
Teacher Professionalism													
<p>Enhanced opportunities to engage in high quality professional learning with a focus on pedagogy</p>	<p>90% of all evaluations indicate that professional learning has positively impacted practice in both synchronous and asynchronous e.g. World Education Summit professional learning.</p> <p>- New measure</p> <p>Increase live attendance at all mandatory probationer training from 90% over session 2020/21 to 95% in 2021/22</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>% Completion of Mandatory Probationer CLPL</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Session</th> <th>Completion (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>90</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Session	Completion (%)	2020/21	90	<p>Building Capacity/ Early Years on-going data collection</p> <p>Building Capacity in June 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All teachers and practitioners, including probationers, mentors and senior leaders within ACC continue to have access to a high-quality professional learning calendar aligned to the ACC Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard to support their development in learning, teaching & assessment Probationers continue to access a quality mandatory training programme 	<p>Building Capacity/ Locality Lead Officer and Office 365 tools</p>					
Session	Completion (%)												
2020/21	90												

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>Increase % completion of Probationary Year programme from 92% to 96% by 2022</p>  <p>Increase the number of Digital Postcards linked to the ACC Learning, Teaching and Assessment standard from 5 in April 2021 to 60 in April 2022</p> <p>Maintain high levels of on-line engagement with digital postcards at 1000 impressions per postcards over time</p> 	<p>Building Capacity in June 2022</p> <p>Raising Attainment on-going</p> <p>Charlie Love and Jacqui Yule on-going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good practice based on key themes is identified, captured and used as a CLPL opportunity including through the use of Digital Postcards being linked to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard - ongoing 	<p>Office 365 tools and school staff</p>



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
Parental Engagement				
<p>Increased participation and confidence of parents and carers in supporting their child/ren</p>	<p>Parent surveys demonstrate increased confidence in supporting their child with literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and the use of digital tools – New measure</p> <p>Maintain good or better evaluations at Family Support /digital literacy Sessions at 85% or higher</p>  <p>10% Increase the number of visits to the Parent Support Hub from 6644 in April 2021 to 7308 in 2022 Baseline 2020/2021 - (from June 2020 to April 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6644 Visits • 4658 Unique users • 11,140 Page Views 	<p>Partnership & Engagement thrice yearly through pulse survey of parents and carers</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement through quantitative and qualitative evaluations</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement through on-going monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of targeted sessions for parents and carers to increase the confidence, engagement and participation of parents in school activity and literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing by June 2022 • LOIP Project delivery of PNS Wellbeing Toolkit sessions for Parents • Delivery of a programme of digital safety for parents and carers by June 2022 • Refresh of the Parent Hub to ensure all parents are provided with accessible information to support learning and to understand the progress and achievements of their children – ongoing • Partnership approach to support the development of digital literacy in adults by May 2021 	<p>Partnership & Engagement / partners</p> <p>Multi-agency partner</p> <p>Safer school App</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement / Building Capacity</p> <p>TBD</p>



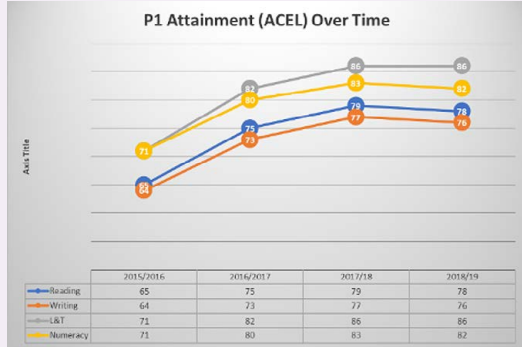
Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
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Assessment of Children's Progress

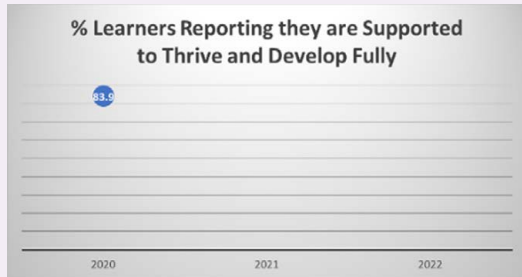
Increased attainment and achievement

100% of schools consistently track and monitor learning progress of all learners – New measure (Nov, Feb, May)

P1 attainment in June 2022 to be as good or better than that of June 2019



Increase in % of learners who report that they are supported to thrive and develop to their full potential from 83.9% in 2020 to 90% in June 2022.



Raising Attainment thrice yearly

- Develop and implement refreshed thrice yearly tracking and monitoring arrangements through SEEMIS P and A and Power BI to ensure consistency of approach and opportunities to further develop moderation practices – Nov 2021
- Utilise monthly tracking of vulnerable groups to support improvement (Care experienced, ASN and Disabled as a minimum)
- LOIP project focused on improving literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 3
- Delivery of Early Years professional learning on Observation, Assessment and Planning.
- LOIP project on improving oral language


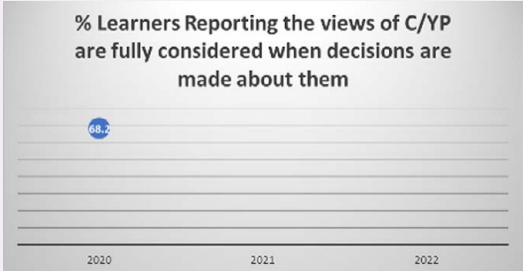

Shona Milne and Allison Horne

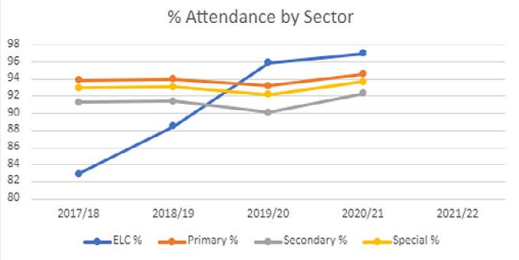
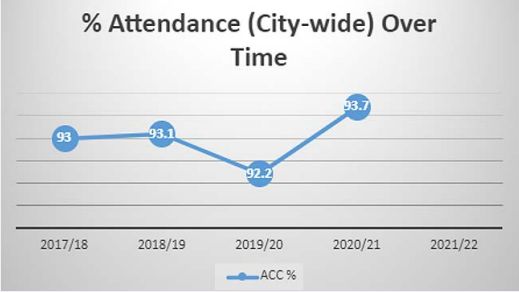
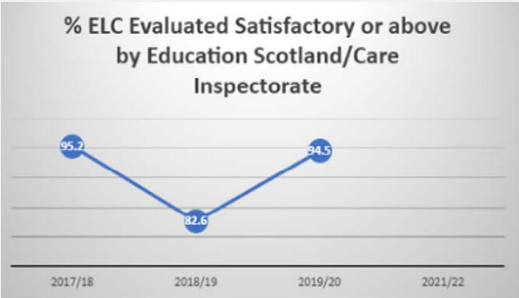
Central

HT reps, central officers and partner

Early Years Locality Leads



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>Increase in the % of children and young people who feel that children and young people with disabilities are treated with respect and have the same opportunities available to them from 66.9% in 2020 to 80% in June 2022</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further development of the role of QUAMSOs (Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer) to support moderation practice across the BGE (Broad General Education) Further development of subject networks to support moderation and practice across the BGE 	<p>Raising Attainment</p> <p>Secondary staff</p>
School Improvement				
<p>An agile education service that takes account of the Child Friendly City/Children's Rights and meets the needs of individual learners and their families</p> <p>Increased collaboration outwith planned trio activity</p>	<p>95% of request for assistance requests are met within 40 days - New measure</p> <p>Increase in the % of learners who feel that the views of children and young people are fully considered when decisions are made about them from 68.2% in 2020 to 75% in June 2022</p>  <p>Increase staff satisfaction with speed of Request for Assistance process from 4.8 out of 6 in 2021 to 5 out of 6 in 2022</p> 	<p>Supporting Learners on-going</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement</p> <p>Supporting Learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement refreshed management structure across ASN services – May 2022 Implement improved use of data across ASN services – Sept 2021 Improve the effectiveness of ASN services and accessibility in accordance with Supporting Learners, Accessibility Plan and Children's Rights – June 2021 Review the curriculum taking into account the impact of the pandemic and consider digital delivery where appropriate 3 secondary schools to participate in the Wood Excellerate Programme 	<p>Officer</p> <p>Staff, Office 365 and Data and Insights</p> <p>HT ASN Outreach Services</p> <p>Secondary HTs and central officers</p> <p>3 secondary schools</p>

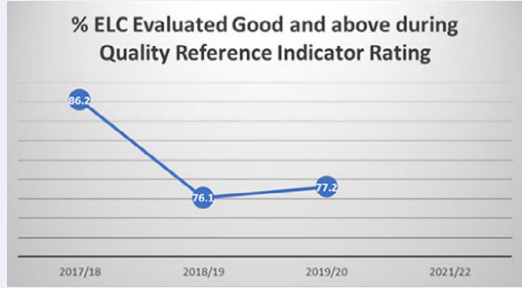
Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>0.5% increase in levels of school attendance across all sectors from 93.7% to 94.2% attendance in June 2022</p>   <p>100% of School Improvement Plans take account of learner voice – New measure</p> <p>98% of local authority and partner provider Early Learning and Childcare settings receive positive Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland reports</p> 	<p>QIOs on a monthly basis</p> <p>QIOs in June 2021</p> <p>Early years on-going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of Local Governance Review Pilot at Northfield Academy in partnership with NESCoL 	<p>Nescol, central officers and Northfield Academy staff</p>



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
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Performance Information

90% of evaluations of quality reference indicators rated as Good or above from inspections of local authority and partner provider Early Learning and Childcare centres by the Care Inspectorate

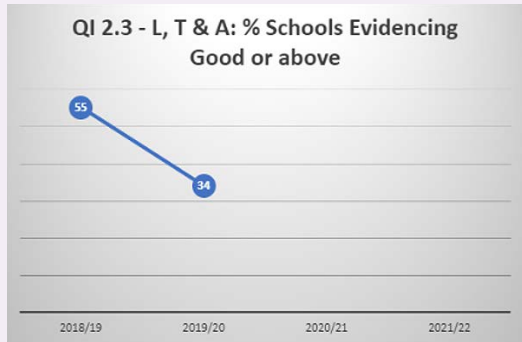


Early years on-going

Improved Learning and Teaching in all schools/settings

50% of schools can evidence QI 2.3 in relation to Learning, Teaching & Assessment at Good or above through Self-evaluation activity

2018/2019 - 55%
 2019/2020 - 36%
 2020/2021 - 36%
 2021/2022 - 45%



QIMs/QIOs on-going

- Plan QI2.3 trio activity to gather evidence of evaluation and improvement in learning, teaching and assessment

Quality improvement Managers

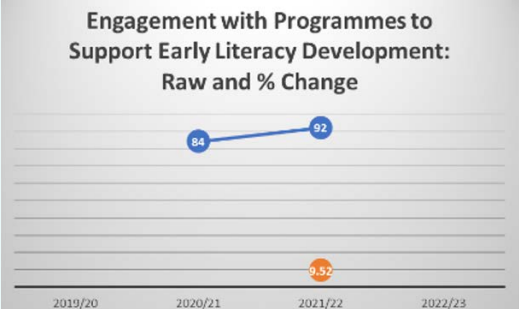

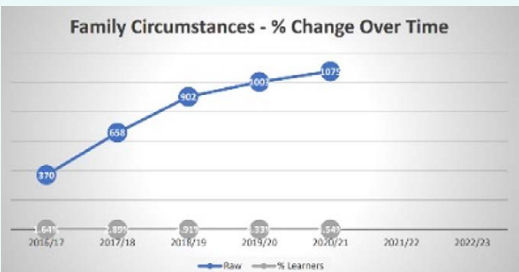


▶ Closing the Gap Action Plan

Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

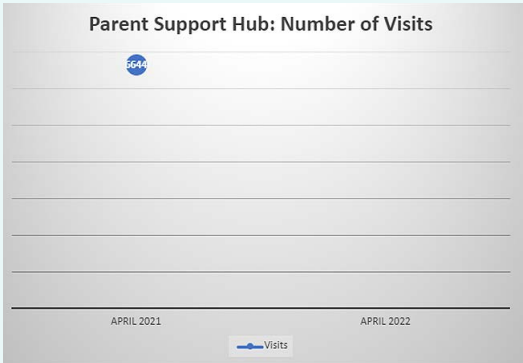
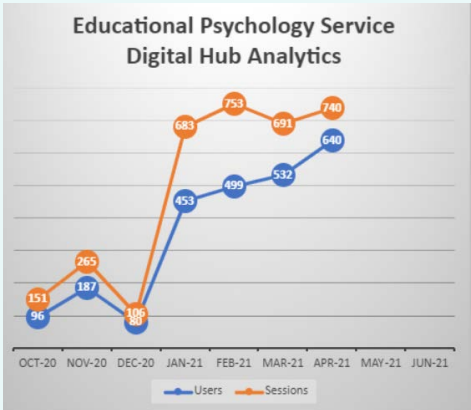


Improvement Outcomes <i>What do we hope to achieve?</i>	Measures of Success <i>How will we know this has been achieved? What evidence will we have?</i>	Data <i>Who is responsible for gathering data and at what points?</i>	Actions Required <i>What do we need to do and by when?</i>	Resources <i>Who and what is required? (including cost/fund)</i>
School Leadership				
<p>Improved partnership working, sharing of practice and learning from and with one another</p> <p>Equitable opportunities for all learners</p> <p>Positive roll out of 1140 ELC hours across ACC</p>	<p>Number of schools who report impactful partnership collaborations outwith PEF and SAC interventions - New measure</p> <p>40% reduction in levels of exclusion in the three priority areas compared with 19/20 levels</p>  <p>15% Reduction in the number of children identified as being at risk of exclusion on SEEMiS from 116 to 100.</p>  <p>100% provision of ELC for all families who wish to receive 1140 hours - New measure</p>	<p>Closing the Gap</p> <p>QIOs on a weekly basis</p> <p>QIOs on a weekly basis</p> <p>Early Years on-going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further develop collaboration for improvement at all levels with a focus on areas of deprivation and sustainability by June 2022 Develop minimum guidelines to support school leaders to ensure costs or lack of equipment do not prohibit access to the curriculum or the participation of children and young people in the life of the school or extra-curricular activities with a particular focus on those who are disabled or care experienced Maintain close monitoring of live exclusion data on a weekly basis Fully implement 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021 Establish the Links Hub and Duthie Park ELC provision as a targeted intervention for families in need of support Successful implementation of the agreed ACC Employability Delivery Plans 	<p>CPAG Toolkit</p> <p>Pupil Equity Fund or SAC</p> <p>Equity & Excellence practitioners</p> <p>QIO and HT</p> <p>ELC Programme</p> <p>Early Years</p>

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
Teacher Professionalism				
Enhanced opportunities to engage in high quality professional learning with a focus on research and pedagogy	10% increase in engagement with programmes to support early literacy development such as Early Talkboost/Talkboost	Building Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talkboost Train the Trainer for ELC Locality Leads to enable further support in localities Develop further understanding of how poverty impacts on child development/a child's ability to learn and of impactful interventions to mitigate this 	Talkboost Training
				
	5% reduction in the number of children identified as having communication needs on SEEMIS from 363 to 345	MIS in June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Scottish Government guidance on restraint when published Continue to work with the EP Service to deliver Ready Steady 2 training and support 	Closing the Gap
				Closing the Gap
	5% reduction in the number of children identified with family circumstances identified as a factor in their needs from 1075 to 1022	MIS in June 2022 Early Years on-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the impact of the ELC expansion Programme from December 2021 	TBD
				Locality Leads and EPS
				All schools and ELC setting
				Early years and Chief Education Officer

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>10% increase in the number of eligible 2 year olds attending ELC provision from 2019/21 levels to 265</p>  <p>Improve attainment at SCQF 3 Literacy and numeracy by 5%</p>  	<p>Closing the Gap</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a literacy and numeracy framework to support practice LOIP improvement project in literacy and numeracy 	<p>Closing the Gap</p> <p>HT reps and Chief Education Officer</p>



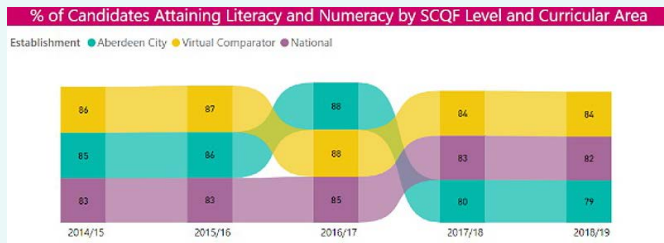
Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
Parental Engagement				
<p>Increased participation and confidence of parents and carers in supporting their child/ren</p>	<p>% of parents who can access PEEP in their local ELC setting – New measure</p> <p>Number of families who have engaged with PEEP – New measure</p> <p>10% Increase in the number of families engaged in family learning activities to support children’s learning and development – New measure</p> <p>10% increase in visits to the Parent Hub from 6644 to 7308</p>  <p>Maintain high levels of engagement with the Educational Psychology Services Digital Hub above 600 sessions per month</p> 	<p>Early Years on-going</p> <p>Early Years on-going</p> <p>Closing the Gap</p> <p>Raising Attainment / Digital on-going</p> <p>EP Service on-going Partnership & Engagement in June 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELC Locality Leads trained to quality assure PEEP training • Roll out PEEP training in all ELC Settings • Promote and clarify local / community supports and family learning/support opportunities to each parent forum including Parent Hub, EP Hub and Stronger Family Series • Strengthen the Partnership Family Support offer (Multi-agency TOM for children group) • Review and improve the EP Hub for families 	<p>ELC Locality Leads and ELC staff</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement</p> <p>EPS</p>

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>Increased number of Parent Volunteers supporting learning in schools – New measure</p> <p>Increase in the number of community food growing initiatives that schools and ELC settings are involved in – New measure</p> <p>Increase in the number of food initiatives housed in or supported by schools – New measure</p>	<p>Closing the Gap on-going</p> <p>Closing the Gap on-going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Volunteer induction guidance will be developed and shared with all parent forum / settings (see current Volunteer guidance) Increase the number of food growing / intergenerational opportunities to access and develop community food gardens Establish food pantries/initiatives to support families in need in local schools or communities 	<p>ACC Volunteer Guidance</p> <p>School staff and officer</p> <p>School staff and officer</p>

Assessment of Children’s Progress

Improved attainment for all in literacy and numeracy

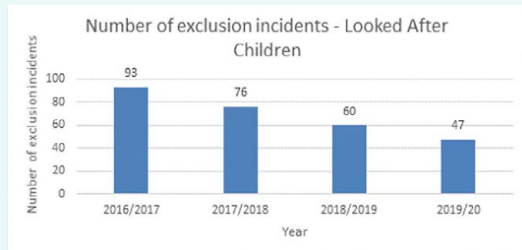
1% Improvement in attainment at S4 at Level 4 numeracy and literacy from 2018/19 levels



Increase % of vulnerable 2-4 year olds accessing early years provision from 679 (12.3%)

% of care experienced parents accessing ELC for their 2 year old – New measure

Reduce the number of LAC exclusions from 47 to 40 by June 2022



Closing the Gap

Early Years and Virtual School on-going

Virtual School

Virtual School

- Agree and implement an agreed approach to addressing performance in numeracy including how to address gaps in numeracy skills
- Agree and implement an agreed approach to addressing performance in literacy including how to address gaps in literacy skills
- Proactively approach care experienced parents to make them aware of the ELC offer for their 2 year old
- Further roll out of MCR pathways (Mentoring Programme)
- Improve awareness of ‘The Promise’ and map next steps

Attainment Advisor report

Closing the Gap / Raising Attainment

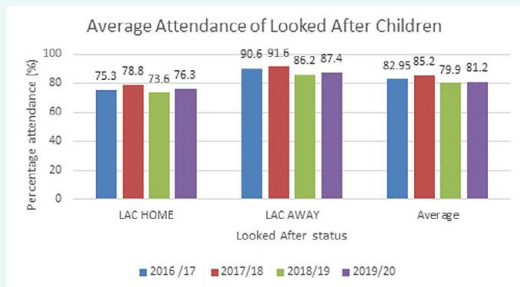
Early Years and Virtual School

Virtual School

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
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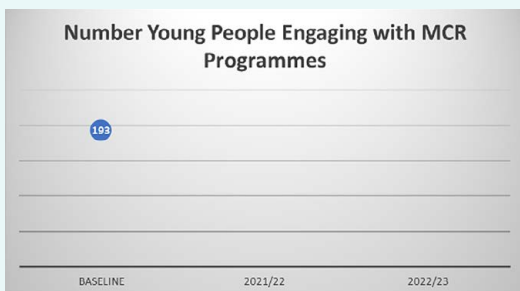
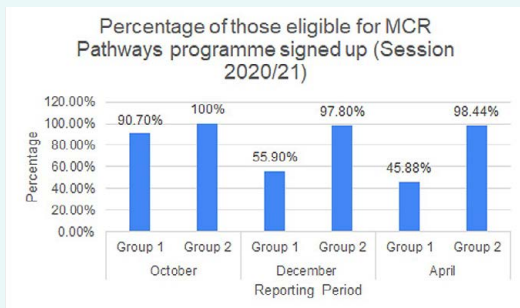
Improve the attendance of children who are Looked after at home from 76.3% to 81% by June 2022

Virtual School



Increase the % of previously care experienced, young carers and those in informal kinship care engaging with MCR pathways to 98% by June 2022 (shown as group 1 below)

Virtual School




Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources										
School Improvement														
All children in ELC will be provided free milk and fruit	100% of settings will be providing free milk and fruit to ELC attendees – New measure	Closing the Gap and Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up funding and application process for all registered childcare settings for free fruit and milk 	Digital solution to be developed										
Performance Information														
Improved impact of interventions	<p>90% of Head Teachers can evidence positive impact of Partnership Forum Plans – New measure</p> <p>50% of schools can evidence Q3.2 in relation to Raising Attainment at Good or above through Self-evaluation activity</p> <p>2018/2019 - 39%</p> <p>2019/2020 - 40%</p> <p>2020/2021 - 34%</p> <p>2021/2022 - 40%</p>	<p>Closing the Gap</p> <p>QIMs / QIOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve arrangements for tracking groups according to disability, protected characteristics and those who are care experienced to be able to make meaningful comparisons Relaunch partnership Forum guidance to help maximise the impact of them Quality Improvement activity in relation to QI3.2 to be planned through trio visits/ collaboration events 	<p>Data and insights and central education officer</p> <p>Partnership Forum Guidance</p> <p>HTs / QI</p>										
<p>QI 3.2 - Raising Attainment and Achievement: % Schools evidencing 'Good' or above</p> <table border="1"> <caption>QI 3.2 - Raising Attainment and Achievement: % Schools evidencing 'Good' or above</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>% Schools evidencing 'Good' or above</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>39%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>40%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>34%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>40%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					Year	% Schools evidencing 'Good' or above	2018/19	39%	2019/20	40%	2020/21	34%	2021/22	40%
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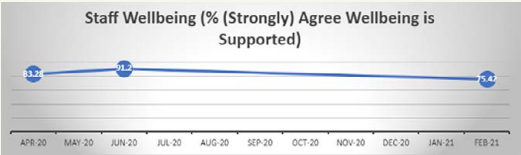



► A Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

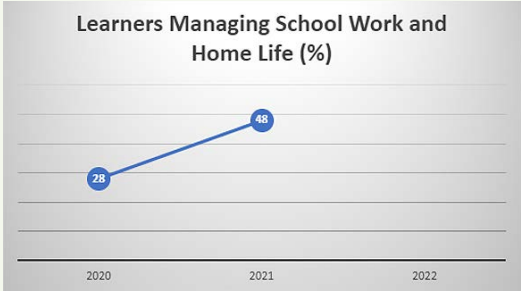
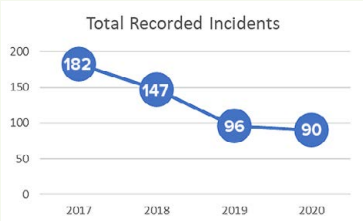
Health & Wellbeing – Improvement in the health & wellbeing of all

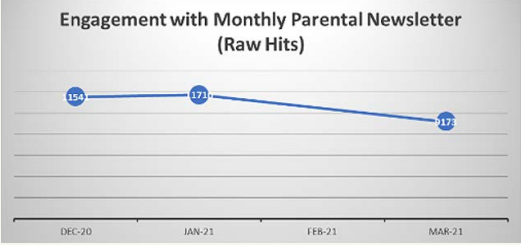



Improvement Outcomes <i>What do we hope to achieve?</i>	Measures of Success <i>How will we know this has been achieved? What evidence will we have?</i>	Data <i>Who is responsible for gathering data and at what points?</i>	Actions Required <i>What do we need to do and by when?</i>	Resources <i>Who and what is required? (including cost/fund)</i>
School Leadership				
<p>Confidence in supporting Children’s Rights in school life</p> <p>Continued and increased collaboration for support and improvement</p> <p>Resilient staff with positive wellbeing</p>	<p>100% of school staff will have accessed professional learning on Children’s Rights – New measure</p> <p>100% of schools will ensure Children’s Rights are referenced as part of their school improvement plans.</p> <p>Increase % of children and young people who report that they actively participate in decision making which impacts them from 80.3% to 85% by June 2022</p> 	<p>Matt Reid / Erin McGowan by September</p> <p>QIMs/QIOs in June 2021</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and roll out of mandatory training in Children’s Rights for all school staff - August 21/ ongoing Shared expectations in relation to Children’s Rights being visible in all SQUIPs (Standards, Quality & Improvement Plans) - March 2020 	<p>Partnership & Engagement, Children’s Rights support materials</p> <p>QIMs</p>
	<p>Maintain positive attendance levels of under 4 days average number of days lost to sickness absence</p> 	<p>Operational Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further develop collaboration opportunities for improvement both at school senior leader level and wider school staff - Ongoing Develop mechanisms to further prioritise, monitor and enhance staff wellbeing as part of a healthy workforce - Ongoing 	<p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing / Building Capacity</p>

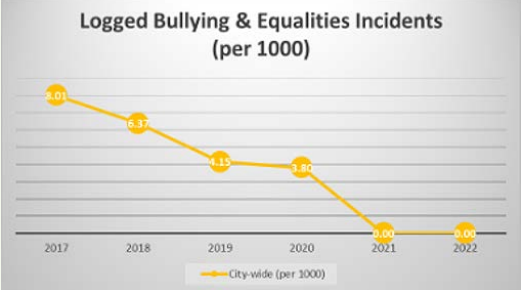
Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>90% of staff report that their wellbeing needs are being met</p>  <p>Positive engagement and feedback from peer support network and coaching sessions</p> <p>Qualitative data – Session feedback</p>	<p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and consider next steps in relation to Multiagency Peer Support network - July 2021 Coaching support for Education staff led and maintained by EP Service - Ongoing 	<p>Health & Wellbeing / Lauren Mackie</p> <p>EP Service</p>
Teacher Professionalism				
<p>Staff teams who can confidently meet the needs of all learners within the context of individual settings</p> <p>Appropriate partnership working to meet learner needs</p> <p>Staff know where and when to access wellbeing support</p>	<p>Increase the number of schools with an identified health and wellbeing lead contact from 60% in June 2021 to 100% in June 2022</p>  <p>80% of staff feel confident about how to directly support, or refer a child for support, and signpost to appropriate partnership services by 2022 – New measure</p> <p>CLPL (Career Long Professional Learning) offer reflects the outcome of the service CLPL audit</p> <p>Maintain over 80% of staff who would recommend CLPL sessions to other colleagues following training</p>	<p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing in June 2022</p> <p>Building Capacity</p> <p>Building Capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & wellbeing lead and Mental health First Aider trained within every school – June 2021 Develop a clear framework to assist staff in signposting supports to children / young people and families – October 2021 Continue to review CLPL offer working with partners including CAMHS and the EP Service to address areas such as mental wellbeing, supporting learners needs, LIAM (Let's Introduce Anxiety Management) training, ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) training, Seasons for Growth, Emotion Coaching and Counselling training - Ongoing 	<p>Building Capacity</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Building Capacity / CAMHS / EPService</p>



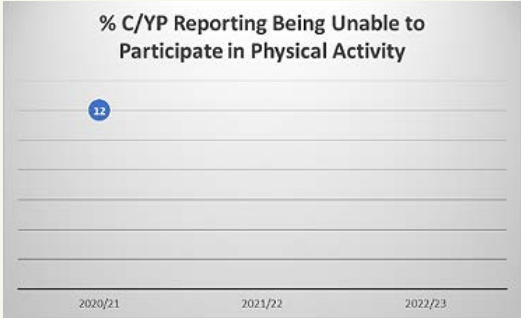
Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources									
<p>Improved support for children with Autism Spectrum Condition</p>	<p>Increase % of learners who find managing school work and home life easy from 48% in January 2021 to 75% in June 2022</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Learners Managing School Work and Home Life (%)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>48</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Percentage	2020	28	2021	48	<p>QIMs / QIOs in January 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the Trainer delivery of Compassionate and Connected Communities - 3 cohorts by June 2021 - ongoing • Roll out of Compassionate and Connected Communities training for all education staff, including EPs and Fitlike Hub staff – from August 2021 Review training and materials in relation to multiagency meetings to ensure clear, solution focused, empathic approaches are taken and clear smart targets are written - Ongoing 	<p>Health & Wellbeing CCC</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing Trained Trainers CCC</p>			
	Year	Percentage											
	2020	28											
2021	48												
<p>5% reduction in the number of incidents in schools compared to 2018/19 levels</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Total Recorded Incidents</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Incidents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>182</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>147</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>96</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>90</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Number of Incidents	2017	182	2018	147	2019	96	2020	90			
Year	Number of Incidents												
2017	182												
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2020	90												
<p>90% of termly sampled plans (IEP and Child's Plans) have clear SMART targets – New measure</p>	<p>Supporting Learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review training and materials in relation to multiagency meetings to ensure clear, solution focused, empathic approaches are taken and clear smart targets are written - Ongoing 	<p>Supporting Learners</p>										
<p>Positive learner/parental feedback following multiagency meetings – focus group of parents/pupils – New measure</p> <p>Qualitative feedback from parents who have children with Autism Spectrum Condition – New measure</p>	<p>EPs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify supports available for those impacted by Autism Spectrum Condition 											

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources																						
Parental Engagement																										
<p>Parents feel confident to share their views and ask for support if required</p>	<p>Maintain positive engagement with parent newsletter with 12,000 hits per edition</p>	<p>Operational Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further develop a culture that supports positive parental engagement by working in partnership to promote diversity and overcome barriers ie Stronger Families Series - Ongoing 	<p>Lead for Stronger Families Series</p>																						
	 <table border="1"> <caption>Engagement with Monthly Parental Newsletter (Raw Hits)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Raw Hits</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>DEC-20</td> <td>194</td> </tr> <tr> <td>JAN-21</td> <td>171</td> </tr> <tr> <td>FEB-21</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MAR-21</td> <td>147</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Raw Hits	DEC-20	194	JAN-21	171	FEB-21	-	MAR-21	147	<p>Chief Education Officer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all parents are aware of Communication, Collaboration & Consultation Framework and know how to express their views, concerns or compliments – Sept 2021 	<p>Communication, Collaboration & Consultation Framework</p>												
Month	Raw Hits																									
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	<p>75% of complaints resolved on time</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with regular parent newsletters responding to current issues – Ongoing 	<p>QIMs</p>																						
	 <table border="1"> <caption>% Complaints Resolved 'On Time'</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>% Resolved 'On Time'</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2019/20 3</td> <td>59.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20 4</td> <td>38</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21 1</td> <td>37.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21 2</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21 3</td> <td>75.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21 4</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22 1</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22 2</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22 3</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22 4</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	% Resolved 'On Time'	2019/20 3	59.5	2019/20 4	38	2020/21 1	37.5	2020/21 2	25	2020/21 3	75.5	2020/21 4	-	2021/22 1	-	2021/22 2	-	2021/22 3	-	2021/22 4	-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey parents thrice yearly to get a sense of their changing needs and tailor plans accordingly 	<p>Donna Cuthill</p>
Year	% Resolved 'On Time'																									
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	<p>% of parents who advise that they know how to access support for their child/family – New measure</p>																									



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
Assessment of Children's Progress				
<p>Reduction of children and young people engaging in wellbeing choices that are harmful to themselves</p> <p>Increase children's understanding of their own wellbeing and where/how to get support</p> <p>Reduce the number of young people being bullied</p>	<p>Improved outcomes from SHINE survey over the next 12 months – New measure</p> <p>10% reduction in the number of young people recorded as being bullied in SEEMiS module from 3.8 per 1000 in 2020 to 3.4 per 1000 in June 2022.</p>  <p>All committee recommendations which impact on children (directly or indirectly) follow engagement with CYP – New measure</p>	<p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>QIMs/QIOs</p> <p>Partnership Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with SHINE (Scottish Health Improvement Network) to review wellbeing needs of learners P6-S6 within ACC – June 2021 / Ongoing • Developing a support survey for younger children considering Health & wellbeing Curriculum (nclusive of substance misuse) to support – January 2022 • Develop guidance to ensure all children / young people have a voice in relation to meeting their needs and this is integral to planning and response – Write it Right – Sept 2021 • Focus group/ Survey of children and young people developed to consider barriers for engagement and support requirements – Ongoing • Develop a clear framework to signpost supports to children / young people regarding mental health and supports – Sept 2021 • Develop and implement participation guidance in keeping with Child Friendly City/Children's Rights to support active participation with children and young people 	<p>SHINE Survey</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement, Write it Right materials / training</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement, Key questions to inform discussion</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>Partnership & Engagement</p>



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
School Improvement				
<p>All learners have the opportunity to engage in a broad range of physical, outdoor and targeted wellbeing activities that meet their individual needs</p> <p>Meeting and supporting ACC climate change plan and working towards a net zero as part of a climate resilient council.</p>	<p>Increase the number of accessible Physical activities that are available to all learners within ACC – This should impact the LOIP stretch aim focusing on childhood obesity - New measure</p>	PEPAS Group	Develop PEPAS (Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport) Group to develop closer partnership working in relation to meeting the physical needs of learners – by May 2021 / ongoing	PEPAS Group
	<p>Reduce the % of children who report being unable to participate in physical activity outwith school from 12% in 2020 to 5% in 2022</p> 	Health & Wellbeing	Encourage schools and families to incorporate physical activity into their everyday routines, e.g. promote the daily mile, active travel	
	<p>Increase the number of staff trained to deliver DBI beyond the pilot 2020/2021 - 9 Aim 2021/2022 - 30</p>	Building Capacity	Pilot DBI (Distress Brief Intervention) in partnership with CAHHS and Penumbra) Training in 2 Secondary Schools, review and further implement across ACC – May 2021/ ongoing	CAMHS / Penumbra DBI Trained staff
	<p>Increase the % of schools who offer children aged 10 and above access to counselling from 27% in 2020 to 100% in 2022.</p> <p>100% of schools are delivering an appropriate Health & Wellbeing curriculum that meets the needs of all children & young people – based on sample – New measure</p>	Health & Wellbeing	Equitable counselling offer for schools required – tender to be developed – January 2022	Scottish Government Funding
		Health & Wellbeing	Develop exemplar Health & Wellbeing Curriculum overviews with signposted materials for delivery including specific guidance on substance misuse and food nutrition – Sept 2021	Health & Wellbeing Templates
Performance Information				
Improved impact of outcomes	75% of schools can evidence improvement in QI3.1 evaluations rated as good or very good 2019/2020 - 68% 2020/2021 - 72% 2021/2022 - 80%	QIMs/QIOs	Quality Improvement activity in relation to QI3.1 to be planned through trio visits/ collaboration events - Ongoing	

► Employability Plan

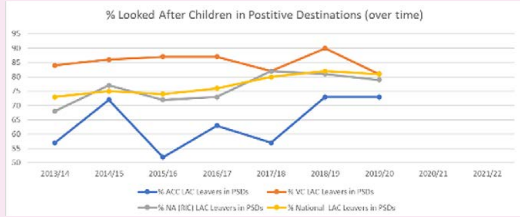
Positive Destinations - Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people																																		
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<i>What do we hope to achieve?</i>	<i>How will we know this has been achieved? What evidence will we have?</i>	<i>Who is responsible for gathering data and at what points?</i>	<i>What do we need to do and by when?</i>	<i>Who and what is required? (including cost/fund)</i>																														
School Leadership																																		
The secondary school curriculum is closely aligned to local growth sectors	Increase in the number of courses which are delivered remotely in order to extend the curricular offer – New measure	Employability & Positive Destinations in June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify which hard to fill subject areas could be supported by a remote delivery or alternative delivery solution Formalise and implement a skills progression which takes account of growth areas 	Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood improvement Group Employability & Positive Destinations																														
	Increase the number of young people engaging in foundation apprenticeships by 15% from 161 to 185.	SDS on an on-going basis																																
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cohort -FA</th> <th>NESCOL</th> <th>Aberlour</th> <th>Bon Accord</th> <th>Totals</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016-2018</td> <td>4</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017-2019</td> <td>36</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018-2020</td> <td>24</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019-2021</td> <td>103</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>113</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020-2022</td> <td>130</td> <td>12</td> <td>19</td> <td>161</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cohort -FA	NESCOL	Aberlour	Bon Accord	Totals	2016-2018	4				2017-2019	36				2018-2020	24				2019-2021	103	10		113	2020-2022	130	12	19	161			
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A range of partners support the delivery of the senior phase	Successful selection of three schools to participate in Excellerate	Chief Education Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 schools to participate in Excellerate with the Wood Foundation Explore approaches to joining up the system through the pilot at Northfield Academy as part of the Local Governance Review 	The Wood Foundation Chief Education Officer and Nescol																														
	Local Government Review Programme Milestones reached on time	Chief Education Officer																																
Young people successfully transition to and from school	Increase the quality of transition plans in place to support those transitioning from primary to secondary and secondary to post school destination based on sample – New measure	QIOs on a monthly basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure timely, effective planning for transition and develop multiagency led transition projects which take account of skills Ensure timely and effective transition plans are in place to support vulnerable groups including those who are disabled and the Care Experienced 	ATA Improvement																														

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
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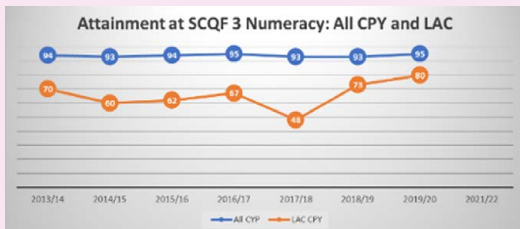
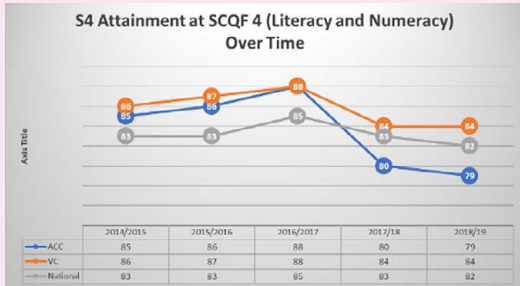
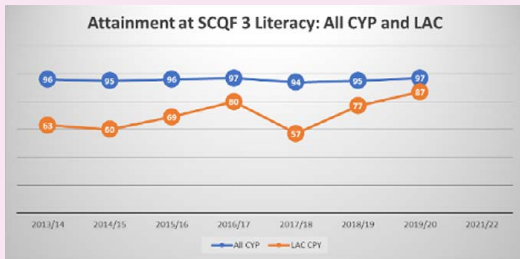
Teacher Professionalism

The progress of vulnerable groups is carefully tracked to inform approaches

Increase the % of care experienced young people (S4-6) who leave school and go to a sustained positive destination in keeping with your virtual comparator



Removal of the gap in performance between the care experienced and other pupils attaining SCQF Level 3 in Literacy and Numeracy



Virtual School to monitor on a monthly basis

Positive Destinations to monitor tracking data routinely

- Collaborate at all levels to take account of The Promise and the Child Friendly City/Children's Rights to explore new approaches to supporting more vulnerable groups such as the Care Experienced and disabled
- Build capacity in practitioners to ensure effective pupil progression in literacy and numeracy skills
- Agree a common approach to identify those who are at risk and agree and implement escalation procedures.
- Continue to embed digital skills in staff and pupils and explore opportunities to harness skill sets from across the partnership in order to improve the in school and extra-curricular offer
- Work in partnership with others (DYW and SDS) to increase opportunities for young people to talk about their skills for life, learning and work

Secondary HTs and central officer time


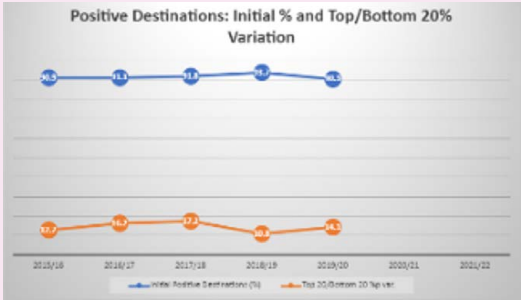
Building Capacity

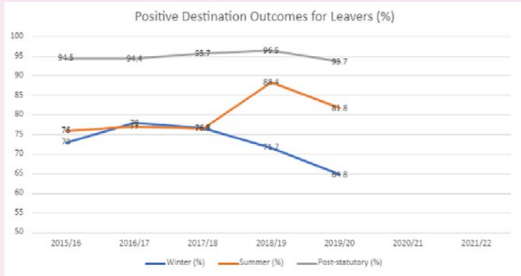
Closing the Gap/Positive Destinations

Charlie Love and Jacqui Yule/Closing the Gap

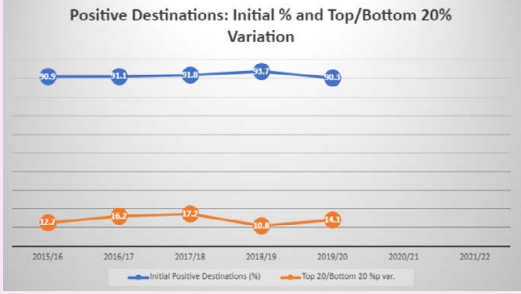
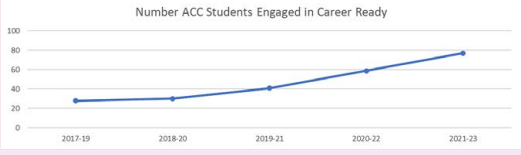
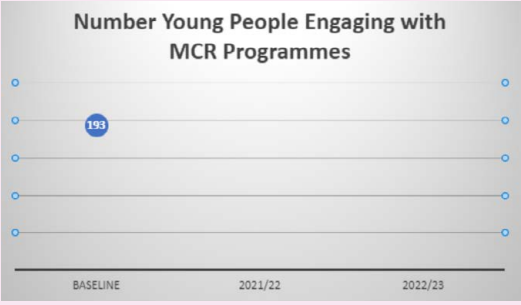
DYW Board and SDS



Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources
	<p>5% reduction in the gap between the care experienced and others attaining 4 or more SCQF awards at Level 3</p> 	<p>Virtual School on an on-going basis</p>		
Parental Engagement				
<p>Parents and carers are aware of growth sectors and the changing economic landscape</p>	<p>Maintain high level of hits on the ABZ website – New measure</p> <p>Increase in school opportunities for all stakeholders (including parents and carers) to explore future skill requirements – New measure</p>	<p>ATA Improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve accessibility of information on growth areas in the City through the development and launch of the one stop shop website Work with families to fully explore how the pandemic and downturn has impacted on opportunities in order to highlight positive learning pathways in growth areas. 	<p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p> <p>Employability & Positive Destinations / Partnership & Engagement</p>
Assessment of Children’s Progress				
<p>Improved use of data for improvement</p>	<p>5% closing of the gap between those in the top 20% according to SIMD and the bottom</p> 	<p>Closing the Gap</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve tracking arrangements to inform the choices of young people and curricular offer through the use of P and A and Power BI Work across the Community Planning Partnership to increase the number of young people with complex additional support needs who enter a positive destination Use Power BI to see how data at class levels impacts on department and city performance 	<p>Central Officers / Business Intelligence Unit</p> <p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p> <p>Central Officers / Business Intelligence Unit</p>

Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources																																
	<p>% of S3-S5 pupils identified as 'at risk' of disengaging that stay on</p> <p>New measure</p> <p>Reduce the gap between those who leave school in winter and summer by 50% by June 2022</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Positive Destination Outcomes for Leavers (%)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Winter (%)</th> <th>Summer (%)</th> <th>Post-statutory (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015/16</td> <td>74</td> <td>74</td> <td>94.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>77</td> <td>77</td> <td>94.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>76</td> <td>76</td> <td>95.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>71.7</td> <td>88.4</td> <td>96.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>65.8</td> <td>81.8</td> <td>95.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Winter (%)	Summer (%)	Post-statutory (%)	2015/16	74	74	94.8	2016/17	77	77	94.4	2017/18	76	76	95.7	2018/19	71.7	88.4	96.5	2019/20	65.8	81.8	95.7	2020/21				2021/22				<p>QIMs/QIOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish systems to routinely sample those at risk of not securing a positive destination including the care experienced and winter leavers to determine any re-design 	<p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p>
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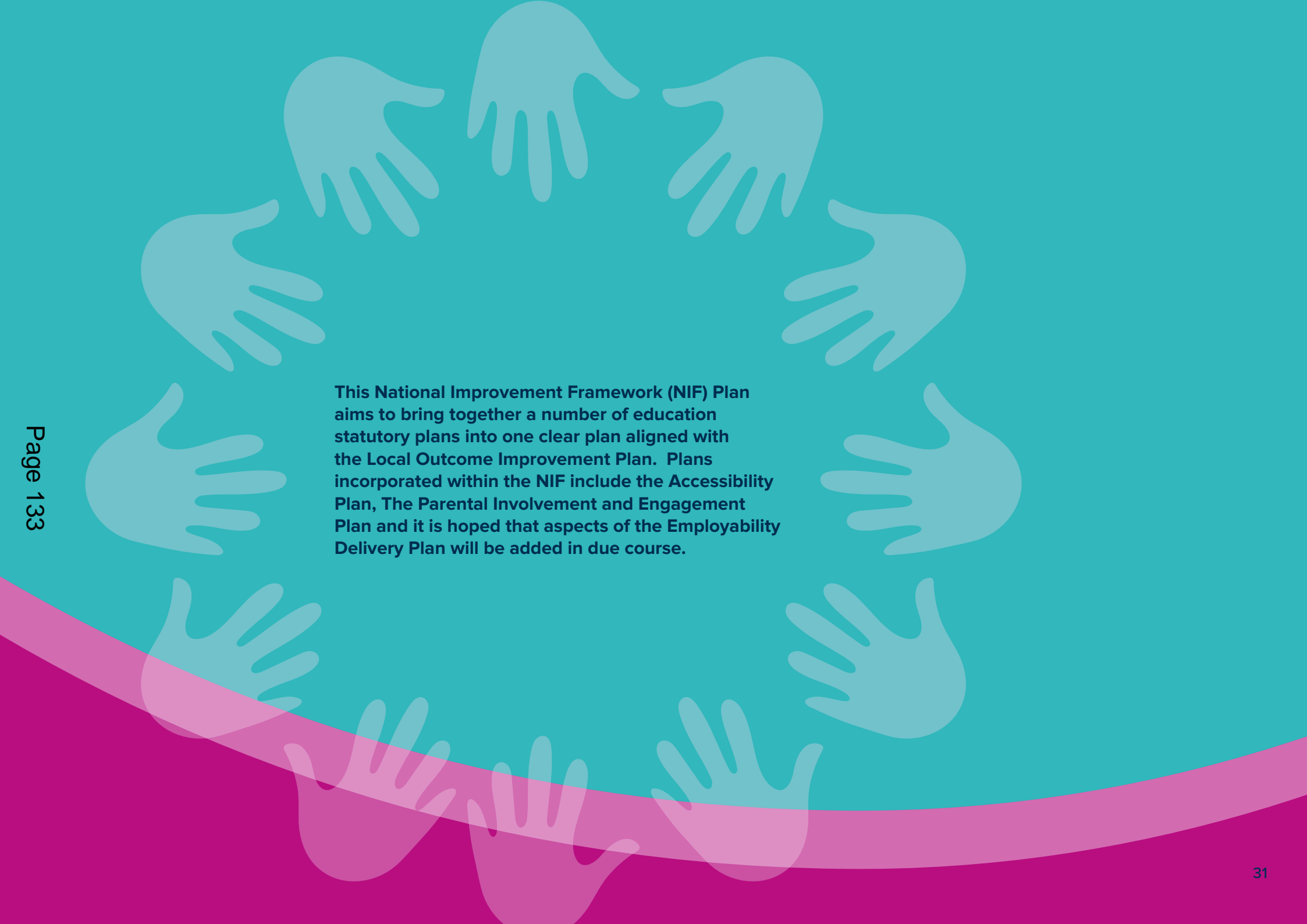


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<p>Increase in the number of young people securing a positive destination</p>	<p>Increase the % of young people securing a positive destination back up to 19/20 levels (93%)</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Positive Destinations: Initial % and Top/Bottom 20% Variation</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Initial Positive Destinations (%)</th> <th>Top 20/Bottom 20 % var.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2015/16</td> <td>90.9</td> <td>12.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>91.1</td> <td>16.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>91.6</td> <td>17.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>93.7</td> <td>16.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>93.5</td> <td>14.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Initial Positive Destinations (%)	Top 20/Bottom 20 % var.	2015/16	90.9	12.7	2016/17	91.1	16.0	2017/18	91.6	17.2	2018/19	93.7	16.8	2019/20	93.5	14.1	2020/21			2021/22			<p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map the range of courses aligned to growth area learning pathways by 2026 to identify how best to reduce duplication and maximise opportunity Increase mentoring opportunities through Career Ready, MCR pathways and other available programmes 	<p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p> <p>Employability & Positive Destinations</p>
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Improvement Outcomes	Measures of Success	Data	Actions Required	Resources																																								
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<div> <p>Duke of Edinburgh: % S3-6 Participation and % Completion</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Duke of Edinburgh: % S3-6 Participation and % Completion</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Duke of Edinburgh (% Completion)</th> <th>Duke of Edinburgh (% S3-6 Participation)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BASELINE</td> <td>1.9%</td> <td>10.49%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div> <p>Expedition/Excursion Participation</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Expedition/Excursion Participation</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Activity</th> <th>2023</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2021</th> <th>Baseline</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>PROJECT-BASED EXPEDITIONS (RAW)</td> <td>13</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>JOHN MUIR (RAW)</td> <td>937</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>JASS (RAW)</td> <td>360</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DUKE OF EDINBURGH (RAW)</td> <td>606</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>					Year	Duke of Edinburgh (% Completion)	Duke of Edinburgh (% S3-6 Participation)	BASELINE	1.9%	10.49%	2021	-	-	2022	-	-	2023	-	-	Activity	2023	2022	2021	Baseline	PROJECT-BASED EXPEDITIONS (RAW)	13	-	-	-	JOHN MUIR (RAW)	937	-	-	-	JASS (RAW)	360	-	-	-	DUKE OF EDINBURGH (RAW)	606	-	-	-
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This National Improvement Framework (NIF) Plan aims to bring together a number of education statutory plans into one clear plan aligned with the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. Plans incorporated within the NIF include the Accessibility Plan, The Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan and it is hoped that aspects of the Employability Delivery Plan will be added in due course.

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Appendix D

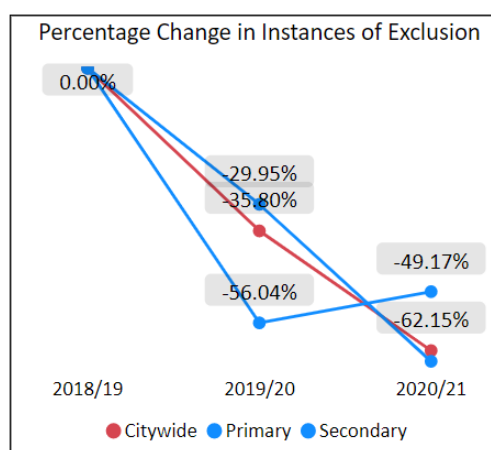
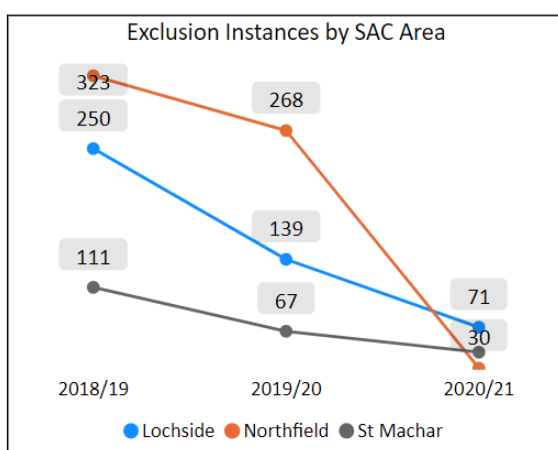
Summary Education Data Analysis 2020/21

The attached offers an overview of currently available critical data sets relating to the 2020/21 academic year which provides early indications of whole cohort gains from the considerable work has been undertaken to address pupil exclusion levels, and progress at Senior Phase against the relative vulnerabilities that, from previous data analysis, have been evident in attainment, and been a focus for improvement planning at this stage within secondary education.

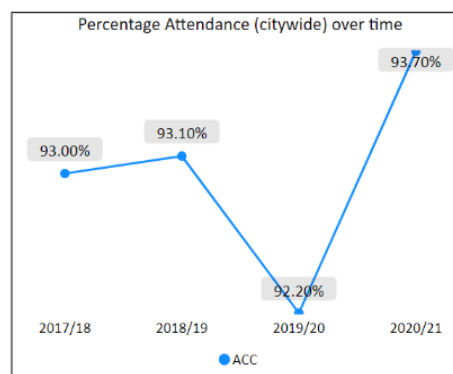
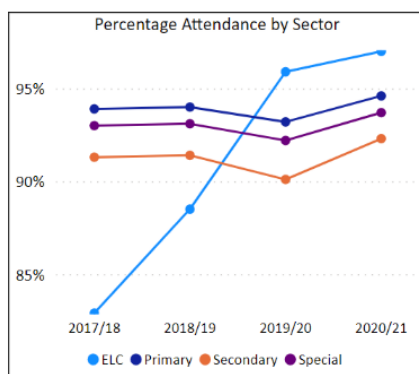
Emerging Data Themes

Attendance and Exclusion Rates

Across the past two years, there have been many positive green shoots emerging from education data, including a sharp decline in live exclusion data in both priority areas and city wide. This improvement is as a result of revised approaches to supporting health and wellbeing, improved access to mentoring programmes, enhanced quality assurance mechanisms and increased flexibility in our schools. This data is monitored on a weekly basis in order to continue to secure improvement



The rise in live attendance data is also very positive with city wide attendance higher than in previous years.



Senior Phase Attainment – SQA Data

Headline senior phase attainment data for 2021/22, from initial SQA data releases, covering the outcomes across the entire presentation cohort, although offering only a

narrow overview of National Qualifications performance at this point in time, is widely better than ever before which is likely to be as a result of many factors including:

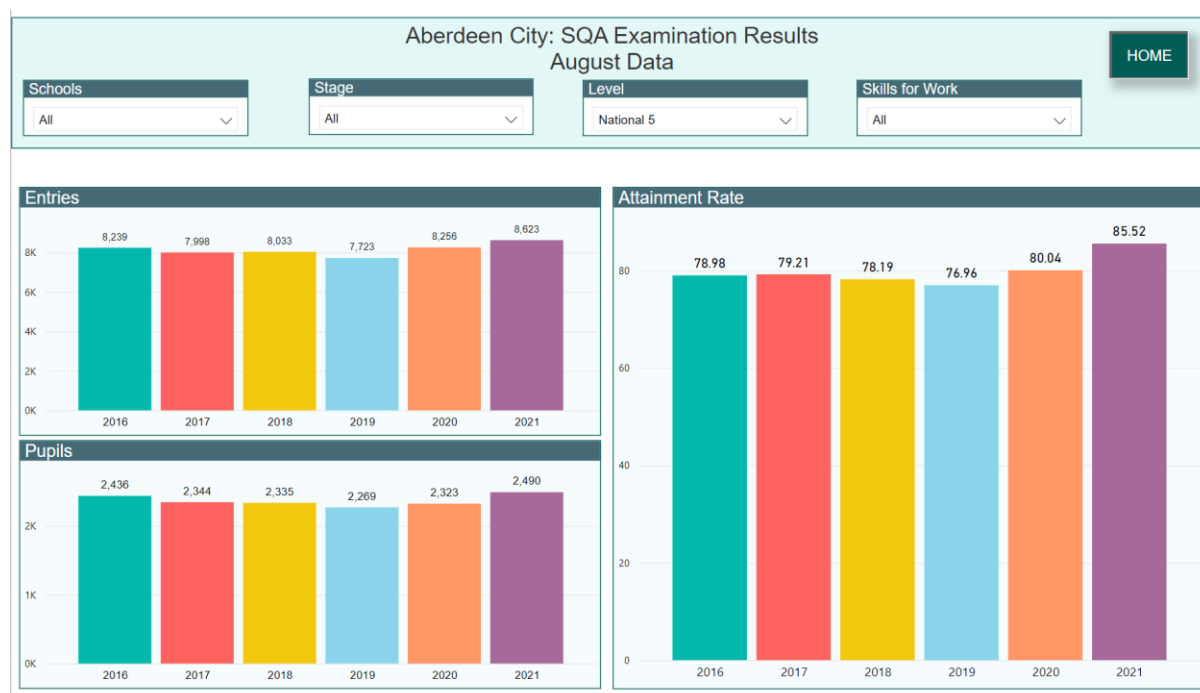
- an improved staffing situation;
- an improved knowledge of the standard;
- an improved use of data (including the use of Power BI as part of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM));
- improved teacher confidence due to greater collaboration across schools and subject specialists during the moderation process;
- changes to assessment methodology which will better suit many young people; and
- a clear and unwavering focus on the things that actually make a difference.

Both the SQA and Education Scotland approved the arrangements for the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) and no challenge has been received since submission of the provisional grades to SQA.

Officers await publication of the final and extended data sets through the Insight tool, necessary to undertake full analysis of each Stage level, including SIMD based outcomes, and progression rates, in October 2021.

At the same time, the available outcomes data is supportive of the Service's anticipation that the positive and significant extent of Aberdeen City Council's response to the pandemic would likely be evidenced in gains within the attainment landscape in 2020/21.

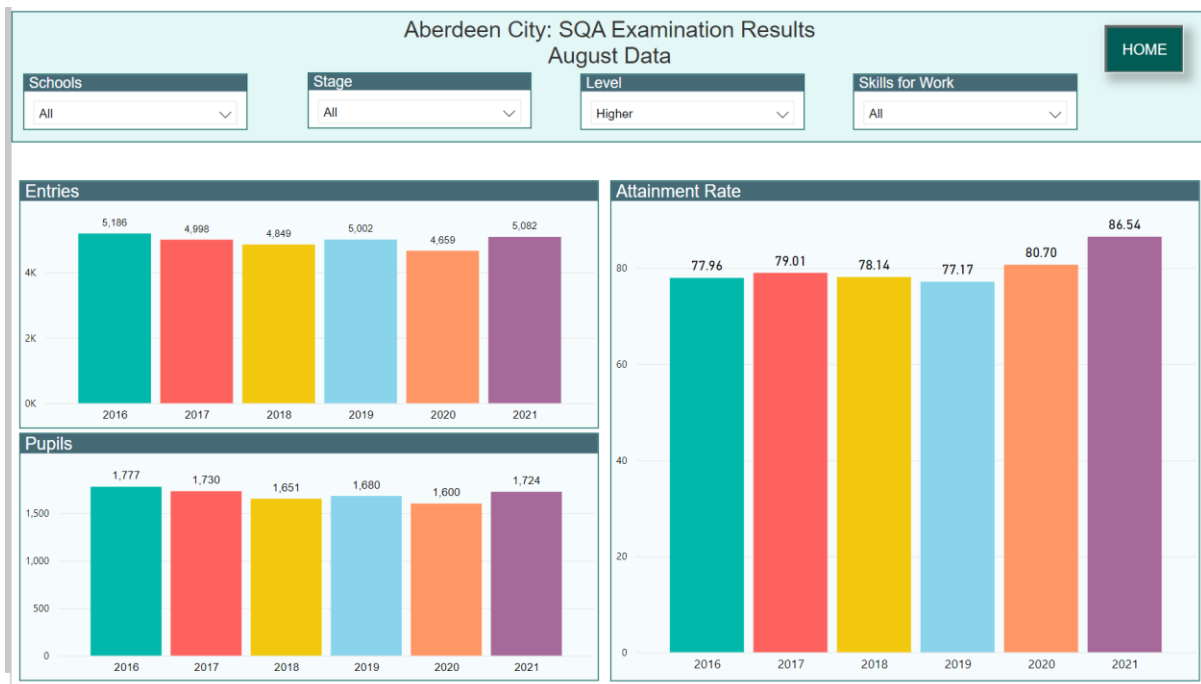
Attainment at National 5 in 2020/21



85.52% of young people in the City entered for a National 5, one of the core Senior Phase benchmarks, gained an A-C pass, which is over 5% higher than last year. This is the highest attainment rate recorded at National 5 in the City and only 0.3% lower than the national pass rate of 85.8%.

More pupils than ever before were presented for a National 5 with presentations at a six year high. This increase is in part due to a rise in the pupil population but also evidences increased ambition for our young people.

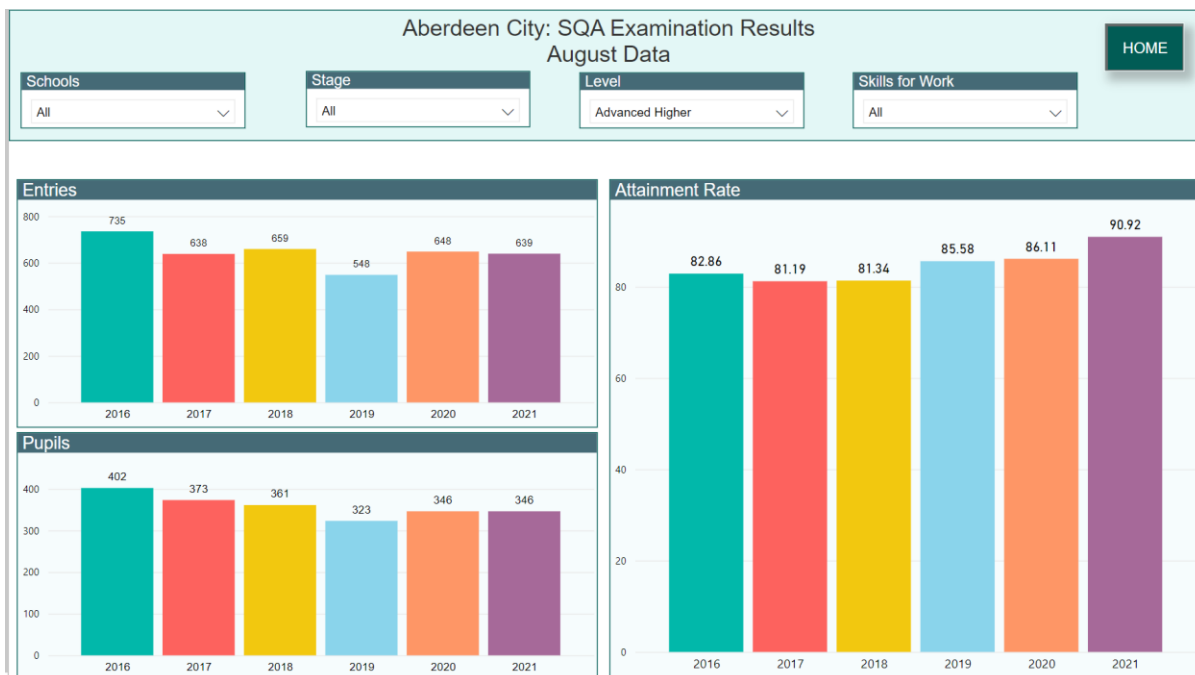
Attainment at Higher Level in 2020/21



86.54% of entries presented for a Higher gained an A-C pass. This represents an improvement of over 6% on 2019/2020. 124 more young people were presented for a Higher than last year.

National attainment at Higher sits at 87.3% with the City pass rate within 1 percentage point of the national.

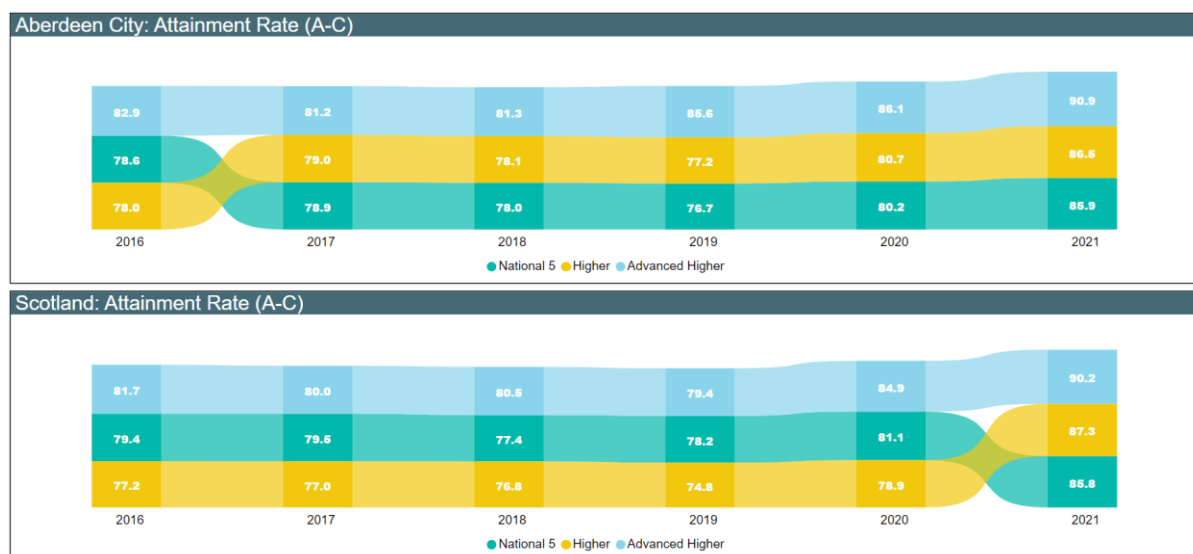
Attainment at Advanced Higher in 2020/21



A similar rise is evident in Advanced Higher awards with nearly 91% of entries presented for an Advanced Higher gaining a pass, this is a 5% improvement on 2019/2020.

Aberdeen City results are slightly above the national pass rate (90.2%) at Advanced Higher.

How does City attainment compare to the national picture?



A clear improvement trend is visible in attainment data. Aberdeen City compares well at the national level across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. The 2021 attainment rate is line with national results and national improvement.

Is the gap closing?

There is clear evidence that there is an increased number of children in lower quintiles being presented at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Attainment has also improved with evidence of the gap being closed. Additional analysis will be undertaken to assess the proportion of pupils in areas of deprivation where the Education domain is seen as a reason for deprivation. The national information will be available in October 2021 as the first part of the Insight data release.

What about the quality of grades and number of entries?

There has been a steady increase in the number of presentations and an increase in the quality of grades achieved. This is evident across all stages (S4, S5 and S6) and is resulting in far fewer grade D and No Awards. The nationally reported rise in A grades is also evident in local data.

In some cases, there is evidence that young people prioritised the courses required to gain entry to Higher Education and sacrificed a course, this will be carefully monitored over session 21/22.

A full report will be taken through EODC when the full analysis has been completed.

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Evaluation of Aberdeen Summer of Play Programme 2021/2022
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/217
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard and Margaret Stewart
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Education Operational Delivery Committee of 23rd June asked that an evaluation of the Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play 2021/22 be shared with Committee at the end of the programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 notes the evaluation of our process in preparing for the Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play;
- 2.2 notes the evaluation of the programme by children, young people and families available in Appendix A;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Education Officer to send a copy of the Summer of Play Evaluation Report to all Summer of Play partners, The Scottish Government and to parents and carers through the Education Service newsletter; and
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Education Officer to use the remaining funds to offer a similar programme for children with additional support needs and their siblings in August 2022.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 Aberdeen City Council received a grant of £418,000 to help improve the wellbeing of children and young people over the summer holiday period.
- 3.1.2 In June 2021, the Education Operational Delivery Committee (EODC) approved a skeletal Summer of Play plan and instructed the Chief Education Officer to implement the plan over the school summer holiday period. Committee also requested that a full evaluation of the programme be

presented to a future meeting of EODC to ensure that lessons learned could be captured and used to inform future offers.

- 3.1.3 The national guidance outlined a set of guiding principles that were to be used in planning summer programmes. The guiding principles were:
- co-creation with children, young people, and families;
 - building on existing services, assets and knowledge of what works; and
 - partnership working and coordination.

- 3.1.4 The national guidance on the Summer of Play advised that a key purpose of the Grant was to:

- Provide **opportunities to (re)connect** with friends, peers, wider community and the outdoors, as well as with trusted adults.
- Provide **opportunities** for children and young people to **play, be active and enjoy themselves**. Activities should be as wide ranging and inclusive as possible to cover all interests, backgrounds and circumstances and shaped around a theme of fun and play with a view to providing positive experiences. Activities may include: sports; expressive arts; crafts; outdoor learning; trips and visits. Time outdoors should be optimised.
- **Equity** - Activities should be accessible to target families and barriers to participation such as transport should be mitigated as far as possible. Consideration should be given to how to meet wider needs, including through the integration of food, childcare, financial inclusion, family support and referral on to wider services where needed.
- **Engagement** – It will be important to build on existing trusted relationships and communication methods so that children and families know about the offer and are encouraged to engage with it.

- 3.1.4 The Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play Programme has been evaluated against the guiding principles and key purpose outlined in the national guidance on the Summer of Play.

3.2 How effectively did the Council plan the programme?

- 3.2.1 The timing of the Grant required the rapid mobilisation of resource to ensure timely delivery of the programme. With only 7 weeks in which to develop the programme and prepare for safe delivery an agile approach was adopted. A multi-agency and cross council Strategic Group was quickly established to oversee the development of the programme.

- 3.2.2 Some partners found uncertainty around Public Health guidance challenging and chose not to make an offer, some found the timescales too short due to other commitments and some tried to re-negotiate arrangements already in place to help satisfy the conditions of the Grant. In addition, some partners approached the Council with an offer when the programme was already in place. Any concerns or issues identified by partners were addressed by the Strategic Group wherever possible and some partners were supported to develop their proposals.

- 3.2.3 The Strategic Group met on a weekly basis and agreed to collaborate through MS Teams outwith those times. This approach provided a mechanism to take decisions quickly and maintain pace. Key pieces of work were shared (for example procurement and finance was held by one member of the Group whilst communications with partners sat with another) and this greatly aided the capacity of the Strategic Group and pace of progress.
- 3.2.4 A rapid audit of existing provision was undertaken including a review of all planned summer activity programmes for children and young people. An electronic survey was issued within one day of receiving the grant with responses requested within a week. This work was undertaken by education and communities staff as equal partners and is indicative of how Officers have played to strengths to ensure effective delivery. Council teams worked well together to promote completion of the survey and are confident that responses were representative.
- 3.2.5 Despite the relatively short timescale for responses over 1800 citizens shared their views and this data proved invaluable in shaping the programme. When the analysis of responses was completed the Strategic Group didn't feel the analysis provided sufficient information to help plan a programme for families impacted by additional support needs and disability. In order to address this gap in knowledge, Wee Too and Autism and Other Conditions Aberdeen were approached for support. The charity and peer support group freely gave of their time and energy to further canvas parents in order to shape an appropriate programme. The Strategic Group are grateful of their support.
- 3.2.6 The approach taken to seeking and taking account of suggested activities from our children, young people and families allowed Officers to extrapolate the needs data required to develop provisional plans for Committee approval. A longer timescale would have allowed young people to be more involved in directly planning the programme. In June 2021 Scottish Government colleagues noted clear alignment between the proposed programme and the self-reported needs of children, young people and families and commended the approach taken by Aberdeen City Council.
- 3.2.7 Partners were asked to provide an indication of how they could help address the needs highlighted through the survey. Taking this approach enabled the Strategic Group to check that proposals from partners clearly aligned with self reported needs. Confirming offers swiftly was of critical importance to ensure that partners were afforded as much time as possible to make detailed arrangements and in some cases recruit staff and the Teams channel was used to support timely decision making.
- 3.2.8 Some partners faced considerable challenges in terms of staffing, and we are indebted to them for their considerable efforts for our children, young people and families. All indications are that they stretched themselves fully to get the programme operational for the start of the summer holiday period. Of particular note is Wee Too who didn't request any resource to support the management of the extensive programme offered. The charity proved that they are indeed small but mighty and the programme benefited from many hours of support from the Wee Too! Ninjas (volunteers). Sport Aberdeen

also faced considerable challenges as they returned staff from furlough and provided an impressive programme for children and young people in tandem with separate programmes designed for children with additional support needs. The Sport Aberdeen commitment to an inclusive programme is greatly appreciated by parents and carers.

- 3.2.9 The goodwill and long hours invested by partners cannot be underestimated. In addition to the time, energy and shared commitment to delivering a high-quality programme the amount of flexibility cannot be overstated. Examples of this include Sport Aberdeen partnering with We Too! to ensure that all offers for children with additional support needs were supported by both the We Too! Ninjas in collaboration with Sport Aberdeen. This partnership enabled We Too! to provide support and guidance to parents and carers as children enjoyed their activities and was further strengthened by We Too! offering training and guidance to Sport Aberdeen staff on how to shape 'relaxed' sessions for families. A further example of the flexibility shown is that Sport Aberdeen approached Robert Gordon University and the Aberdeen Sports Village on our behalf to help secure enough pool time for our swimming offer. The time, energy and expertise of partners in the preparatory phase was freely given at no cost to the Council.
- 3.2.10 As planning was being finalised an Operational Group was established to help oversee the summer programme. The Operational Group held virtual meetings with partners to start building relationships, provide an opportunity for partners to raise any questions and explore important practical steps required around health and safety and child protection. This approach enabled the Strategic Group to hold the responsibility for the design and launch of the programme and allowed the Operational Group to fully prepare for the programme.
- 3.2.11 Some of the Summer of Play funding was allocated to funded partners of the Council so that they could extend their community-based programmes and plans. Where this happened, partners enhanced their offer further to ensure no duplication.
- 3.2.12 Sport Scotland provided additional funding to Sport Aberdeen. Sport Aberdeen ensured that the additional resource further enhanced the Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play programme by offering funding to member organisations of the Active Aberdeen Partnership and local community sports clubs to help them develop their own programmes. Sport Aberdeen also added additional opportunities in the established Summer of Play programme where demand was high.
- 3.2.13 The success of the approach taken has ensured that all of the general principles in the national guidance were adhered to. The Strategic Group and Operational Group are grateful for the unwavering commitment of partners to deliver the best programme possible for our children, young people and families.

3.3 How well did we prepare for the launch?

- 3.3.1 The scale of the programme required the development of a technical solution for bookings. Customer experience colleagues considered a range of

options and determined that Microsoft Bookings would provide a means of handling bookings, any cancellations and the provision of lists to partners in order that we could satisfy Public Health requirements for contact details.

- 3.3.2 It was agreed that 2 partners delivering specific programmes, Sport Aberdeen and We Too! would manage their own bookings through Eventbrite in case families had particular questions about the activities they were operating. All routes to book were made available on the city website.
- 3.3.3 Even with Sport Aberdeen and We Too! managing their own bookings the scale of the set up cannot be underestimated and considerable Council resource was channelled to both the establishment and testing of the booking system, the design of the webpages and associated communication plan. The Strategic and Operational Groups are extremely grateful for the many daily hours given to the programme by Customer Experience colleagues who took full responsibility for establishing, populating, testing and operating the booking system.
- 3.3.4 Establishing daily 'check-ins' helped clarify what colleagues in Customer Experience required from partners for the booking system and webpages. The Strategic Group provided the information requested as the Operational Group continued to work through the finer delivery details with partners.
- 3.3.5 After a period of robust system testing a 'go live' date was set and media colleagues and school leaders supported the launch.
- 3.3.6 An online self-serve booking approach was opted for by both Aberdeen City Council and Sport Aberdeen. Digital support was available for those who did not have easy digital access. Minimal contact at the Customer Contact Centre was received (less than 1% of overall bookings) which would suggest the system was accessible and user friendly. The bookings process was split into 3 phases. Bookings were firstly opened to those who came under the priority criteria to ensure that we reached our priority groups. Phase 2 of the bookings process was for those families not within our priority criteria. Phase 3 of the bookings process was implemented after one-week, with families able to book more than the initial 4 activities limit.
- 3.3.7 Social media engagement ahead of the bookings opening was at 8.3% which is 6% above average campaigns. The webpage has had a total of 21,000 unique visits since go live. The webpage was able to provide customers with frequently asked questions to reduce demand into the contact centre.
- 3.3.8 Cross Council preparations were thorough. Limited negative feedback through social media was quickly taken into account in order to improve the customer experience.

3.4 Did the programme provide opportunities to reconnect and be active?

- 3.4.1 A full evaluation of the programme based on feedback from children, young people and families is available in Appendix A. The Aberdeen City Council run programme made 7551 different bookable opportunities available to children and young people as well as a wide array of more bespoke arrangements for children with complex additional support needs.

- 3.4.2 The We Too! programme made 2193 bookable opportunities targeted at children with additional support needs and their siblings, and Sport Aberdeen made a wide range of sporting and adventurous opportunities (5975) available. These offers constitute in excess of 15,000 bookable opportunities for families across Aberdeen City and a range of more bespoke arrangements for families and those living in priority areas.
- 3.4.3 Opportunities delivered through We Too! were exceptionally well attended with We Too! social media channels used to advise of last minute cancellations. This helped WeToo! operate high occupancy over the course of the programme. This demonstrates the clear demand for supports for families impacted by Additional Support Needs and disability.
- 3.4.4 Partners adapted their approach based on feedback during the sessions. Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust offered daily activities for different ages of children and young people and as such had a very high volume of activity. The Trust combined some sessions where there was n't high demand (generally older young people sessions were less requested) to ensure that those who were keen to attend could access a longer session. Occupancy levels were 74% but this figure doesn't take account of the changes made mid programme. When mid programme changes are taken into account occupancy rises to 79%.
- 3.4.5 The programme was extensive with a range of activities available for all age groups. Parents and carers were asked to let us know if they were unable to attend sessions to allow us to offer places to those off the 'wait list'. This e-mail reminder helped remind parents to cancel bookings if their child was no longer able to attend due to self-isolation arrangements or other commitments.
- 3.4.6 The lateness of some cancellations did present some challenges in terms of filling spaces from our 'wait list' due to the scale of the programme and not all families advised that they wished to cancel the booking. Earlier reminder notification may have supported earlier cancellations and the timing of the reminder will be considered if establishing a similar programme again in the future.
- 3.4.7 Analysis of under capacity activities shows that high volume activities (daily opportunities for some sports, dance and play) tended to have some spare capacity. Feedback shows that the smaller group dynamic did not hamper the enjoyment or value of the session.
- 3.4.8 This suggests that there is a desire for longer but less frequent sessions and this will be taken into account if planning a similar programme again. Where over provision became apparent and spaces were not fully utilised, plans were amended to reduce the total number of sessions whilst lengthening the sessions times available. In general terms, there was less demand from young people in the senior phase. This may indicate that they didn't require the programme to re-engage with friends. It would be helpful to engage a focus group of young people to support planning if asked to develop a similar programme again.

- 3.4.9 The programme provided a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to connect. There are lessons learned around high volume activities and the design and development of activities for young people in the senior phase which will be taken into account if asked to develop a similar programme again.
- 3.4.10 The Programme effectively provided opportunities for children and young people to connect. The operation of the programme also highlighted the high demand for opportunities for children with additional support needs and their siblings. Of particular note is that these activities had low cancellation levels indicating a strong need for connection. It is proposed that any unspent funds be used to provide a similar programme to be developed to target at children with additional support needs and their siblings in summer 2022.

3.5 To what extent was the programme equitable?

- 3.5.1 Professionals were given 36 hours to book particularly vulnerable children and young people into activities. These spaces were limited to those most in need of support in the categories already identified in the Summer of Play report of June 2021.
- 3.5.2 The timing was challenging but a review of the data suggests that this approach did effectively allow those most in need to access activities over the summer months with around 70% of opportunities being taken up by our priority groups.
- 3.5.3 Families who were unable to book activities were supported by staff from across the partnership and were able to make bookings in libraries or by phoning the Customer Contact Centre Line.
- 3.5.5 The majority (around 70%) of activities ran in our priority areas and no requests for support with transport were received. Sport Aberdeen provided transport for more adventurous activities outwith bus routes. This would suggest that the programme was fully accessible.

3.6 Did families engage with the offer?

- 3.6.1 Despite the extensive programme, parents and carers were asked to book only 4 sessions in total initially to ensure that as many families as possible could benefit from the offer.
- 3.6.2 The bookings opened at noon on 17th June and within 4 hours over 3000 bookings had been made for the ACC managed events alone. This would suggest that the programme was well advertised and that the families were keen to take advantage of the programme.
- 3.6.3 Social media was used to help advertise the offer in advance of the launch and the engagement statistics were monitored to check reach. Within 4 hours of the launch over 15000 impressions were made through social media and 95 individuals had 'retweeted'.
- 3.6.4 In advance of the launch almost all of the social media comments had been positive about the scale of the programme. A few comments on the day of

the launch raised issues with the webpage and the Customer team quickly made amendments to take account of feedback.

- 3.6.5 A wide range of positive qualitative feedback has been received from our children and young people and is contained in Appendix A. The Strategic Group are confident that engagement with the Summer of Play programme has been exceptionally positive and that engagement has been high.

3.7 Did the programme effectively support the vulnerable groups identified?

The Sport Aberdeen Managed Programme

- 3.7.1 Sport Aberdeen made 5975 offers available and 3006 of those were taken by children and young people in our priority groups. The offers made in collaboration with We Too! are not included in these figures.
- 3.7.2 955 Sport Aberdeen participants lived in our priority areas (Torry 177, Seaton/Tillydrone 173 and Northfield 605.) 999 of the 5975 opportunities were accessed by children in receipt of free school meals.
- 3.7.3 249 Sport Aberdeen opportunities were accessed by care experienced children and young people and a further 145 by young carers.
- 3.7.4 The Sport Aberdeen offer was really popular with children with additional support needs who were able to access mainstream activities and 373 children attended. 285 children who were siblings of those with additional support needs also benefited. Some of these siblings will also be young carers.
- 3.7.5 2935 children who were not in our priority groups also benefited from the Sport Aberdeen Summer of Play.

The We Too! Managed Programme

- 3.7.6 We Too! offered a range of activities including their 'relaxed sessions' which are sessions which have been sensory adjusted to be as inclusive to as many as possible in an understanding and compassionate environment. This allows peer support and friendships to develop between both children and parent/carers attending.
- 3.7.7 All activities made available through We Too! supported either a child with additional support needs or a sibling of a child with additional support needs who may also be recognised as a young carer. As a result, 100% of provision supported our priority groups. Of great value was that activities also supported families.
- 3.7.8 We Too! used their social media channels to advertise any late availability and were able to effectively mitigate any risks associated with self-isolation. Non-attendance figures were extremely low.

The Aberdeen City Council managed programme

- 3.7.9 The Aberdeen City run programme made 7551 bookable opportunities available from a range of smaller organisations and in house offers. 3923 of the bookable opportunities were taken by children and young people in our priority groups.
- 3.7.10 1423 participants who booked lived in our priority areas (Torry 361, Seaton/Tillydrone 312 and Northfield 750). 1495 were accessed by children in receipt of free school meals.
- 3.7.11 237 bookable opportunities were accessed by care experienced children and young people and a further 109 by young carers.
- 3.7.12 The activities were well received by children with additional support needs with 335 children accessing bookable opportunities, 324 children who are the sibling of a child with additional support needs also benefited who may also have been identified as a young carer.
- 3.7.13 In addition to the bookable events, childcare provision for children with moderate additional support needs and their siblings was available. This provision has been exceptionally well received and has filled a gap in provision for some families and provided much needed short term respite for families in the knowledge that their children were happy and well supported. Where lack of finances would have prohibited longer term attendance, funding was made available to cover this.
- 3.7.14 A number of families have approached the service to request that the service continues as it effectively addressed a gap in provision. 100% of this service was accessed by our priority groups, 19 children and 5 siblings accessed 164 sessions in total.
- 3.7.15 Seven children attended Countesswells ASN Holiday Club who attend the Additional Support Needs After School club weekly, this was 36% of total attendance. Parents expressed that it was great to have a service that meant they didn't have to rely on other family members or change their work pattern during the holidays and that for some it maintained a routine and that then had a positive impact at home.
- 3.7.16 Families of those impacted by complex additional support needs greatly appreciated and valued the range of supports made available for them. Professionals supporting the families believe that these offers have provided good support to families over the summer holiday period. Arrangements were bespoke to the needs of individual families and this personalised planning helped ensure that families could access what they needed. 100% of these offers were accessed by our priority groups. This support was provided for 67 children and young people, a number of whom had been previously required to shield, hence had not been attending education nor had been afforded other opportunities for socialisation.

- 3.7.17 Offers to families ranged from extending time for children with most complex health and disability, in the newly developing playscheme at Orchard Brae School, additional sessions within the playscheme specific to children with autism and more complex health needs, woodland adventure activity day camps, one to one outings for socialisation and fun for children and their carers, whole family trips out, including where required, transport costs, to local attractions as well as, where appropriate those further afield.
- 3.7.18 The programme effectively targeted the groups and highlighted a particular need from those with additional support needs and their siblings.

3.8 How did COVID-19 impact the programme?

- 3.8.1 The majority of the Summer of Play offer took place outdoors providing a safer environment, lessening the restrictions placed on children and young people, enabling activities that were both safe and freeing. Covid-19 did impact on the maximum numbers some sessions could offer for example, family sessions where adults needed to physically distance and contributed to the total number of people needed to be limited.
- 3.8.2 All sessions were pre-booked and no sessions could be 'drop in' due to the need to collect data for Public Health. The operational group worked closely with the Corporate Health & Safety Team to provide a Summer of Play Covid-19 Risk Assessment template that was easily adjusted for each partner's context.
- 3.8.3 Programme information was shared with Public Health ahead of the Summer of Play starting and booking information and session registers were collected so information could be easily passed on to Public Health should the need arise. Colleagues in Environmental Health were also available to provide advice and guidance.
- 3.8.4 The Operational Group and partners worked well within the restrictions in place and the restrictions of the pandemic are not thought to have hampered delivery of the programme.
- 3.8.5 Resource was identified to cover cleaning costs that would have been necessary if activities had to move from outdoor to indoor venues. Indoor venues were rarely required and this has contributed to an underspend. Some partners did not require the level of staffing anticipated as staff were largely unaffected by the need for self-isolation and their invoices have been amended accordingly.
- 3.8.6 All children and young people who participated were asked to rate their experience. The average enjoyment rating was 9.5 out of 10 so we can confidently say that the restrictions didn't impact on enjoyment.

3.9 Legacy of the Summer of Play Programme

- 3.9.1 The investment in our community assets has helped provide much needed resources which will help them deliver similar programmes to their communities in the future.

- 3.9.2 The superb efforts of Partners clearly shows that utilising the strength of partners improves service delivery. Consideration will be given to how we could capitalise on these relationships and partnerships further as we move through the Recovery Phase. The reach of We Too! and their well established relationships with families provides a real opportunity to think differently about how we work together to support families impacted by additional support needs.
- 3.9.3 The approach to the design, development and delivery of the programme has been highly effective. The approach will be captured so that it can be used as a blue-print for any similar opportunities in the future.
- 3.9.4 The efforts and impacts generated through Summer of Play are palpable, it demonstrates what is possible when partners and colleagues work together at full stretch for the benefit of children, young people and families, a great example of one team. This work provides a stronger foundation for future cross organisation and partnership working.
- 3.9.5 The Summer of Play strategic and operational groups brought together staff working across Education, Children's Social Work, Early Intervention & Community Empowerment, Customer Experience, Estates and a range of others. This matrix approach brought new working relationships as well as developing existing ones. These relationships extended to Summer of Play delivery partners across sports, science and technology, arts, Additional Support Needs and communities. In many instances organisations and services, were beginning to operate face to face following Covid-19 restrictions, Summer of Play created the impetus, guidance and confidence to do this collectively.
- 3.9.6 Earlier lead in times and Covid19 safe working environments for future initiatives would enable a more engaging co-creation with children, young people and families, however the demand, satisfaction rating and feedback from Summer of Play suggests it was pitched just right, it was an overwhelming success and there is an appetite for more.
- 3.9.7 The fair weather resulted in cleaning costs being lower, a lack of positive COVID-19 cases reduced the costs of associated, 'deep cleans'. In some cases, staffing levels were lower than anticipated and invoices from partners have been amended according. As a result there is an underspend of £31,226.14. Scottish Government has asked that we advise them of how we intend to use any underspend.
- 3.9.8 Given that some resource is already in place to support children in our priority areas, it is proposed that the £31,226.14 underspend be used to provide an offer for children with additional support needs (and their siblings) over the next school holiday period.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The costs of the Summer of Play programme were met from existing Council budgets and resources available from the Summer of Play Grant. The full Grant was allocated as of June 2021 although some costs have not been as high as first anticipated. As a result £31,226.14 remains to be spent.

PROVIDER TYPE & NAME	ALLOCATED
TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED	£418,000.00
INTERNAL-ACC	£93,238.06
EXTERNAL-TECHFEST ABERDEEN	£2,000.00
EXTERNAL-ABERDEEN SCIENCE CENTRE	£3,457.00
ALEO-SPORT ABERDEEN	£109,880.00
EXTERNAL- ABERDEEN FOOTBALL COMMUNITY TRUST	£25,534.00
EXTERNAL-CITYMOVES	£8,492.00
EXTERNAL-ABERLOUR (Futures)	£11,005.00
EXTERNAL - NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE	£12,600.00
EXTERNAL - WE TOO!	£10,938
EXTERNAL - ABERLOUR OPTIONS 1	£8,500.00
EXTERNAL - ABERLOUR OPTIONS 2	£10,000.00
EXTERNAL - GRAMPIAN AUTISTIC SOCIETY	£35,623.00
EXTERNAL - LINN MOOR	£4,001.80
EXTERNAL - DIRECT PAYMENTS TO CLIENTS	£31,000.00
EXTERNAL - ABERDEEN LADS CLUB	£10,455.00
INTERNAL - BALNAGASK COMMUNITY CENTRE	£300.00
EXTERNAL - CULTIVATE ABERDEEN	£500.00
EXTERNAL-JESUS HOUSE TORRY	£1,750.00
EXTERNAL - KINGS CHURCH FOUNDATION	£2,000.00
EXTERNAL- NORTHFIELD CONGREGATIONAL FUND	£1,000.00
EXTERNAL - NORTHFIELD COMMUNITY CENTRE	£1,500.00
EXTERNAL - CUMMINGSPARK COMMUNITY CENTRE	£1,000.00
EXTERNAL - TESCO HUB PROJECT	£1,000.00
EXTERNAL - MASTRICK COMMUNITY CENTRE	£1,000.00
TOTAL SPENT	£386773.86
	£31,226.14

BALANCE

4.2 The underspend of £31.226.14 is due to a saving in both cleaning and staffing costs.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	Failure to review lessons learned could lead to missed	L	An extensive evaluation has been undertaken.

	opportunities in the future		
Compliance	Not complying with COVID-19 guidance to reduce risk to children and young people	L	All aspects of the Summer of Play programme were carefully risk assessed to mitigate risk in keeping with national guidance.
Operational	Risk of those delivering the programme not having the information they required.	L	Arrangements were in place to provide the information required along with an 'on call system' to ensure partners were supported.
Financial	N/A		
Reputational	Risk of not seizing the opportunity to develop a programme to support the wellbeing of those most adversely impacted by the pandemic	L	Implementation and carefully monitoring of the programme with an agile approach led to a highly effective programme.
Environment / Climate	N/A		

7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p>UNICEF Child Friendly accreditation and Commit to closing the attainment gap while working with partners across the city</p>	<p>The programme was designed by children and young people and positively impacts on our work to embed the views of children and young people in our development of proposals. The summer programme effectively supported the wellbeing of learners enabling them to engage more fully with more formal education in the new school year.</p>
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The programme supported the delivery of nearly all Children & Young People Stretch Outcomes in the LOIP. The paper seeks approval to deliver a summer programme which will support the wellbeing of a large number of children most negatively impacted by the pandemic and is likely to positively impact on the following LOIP outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of children and young people will report that they feel mentally well by 2026. • 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. • 95% of children living in our priority localities will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. • Child Friendly City which supports all children to prosper and engage actively with their communities by 2026.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	The report supports delivery of the Child Poverty Action report, which fulfils the requirements placed upon the Council by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Evaluation of The Aberdeen City Council Summer of Play

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Summer of Play

Evaluation
Summer 2021



Summer of Play



Through funding received from the Scottish Government by local authorities, Aberdeen City Council's Summer of Play programme aimed to support the wellbeing of children and young people across the city who have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Aberdeen City Council worked with a range of partners to co-create and co-deliver a programme based on the self-reported needs of children, young people and families.

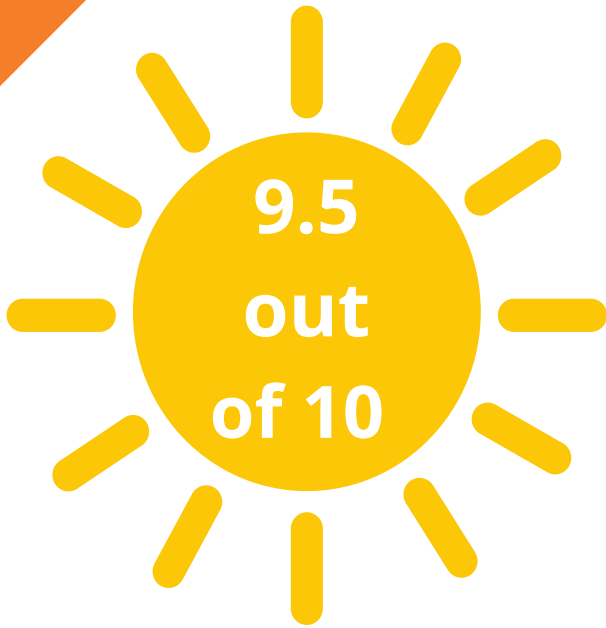
"Wish it could have lasted longer. Enjoyable exhausting fun!" – child at Family Learning activity

Summer of Play provided activities for children and young people to play, be active and enjoy themselves, providing opportunities to (re)connect with friends, peers and the wider community. Emphasis was placed on outdoor activities and barriers to participation were mitigated as far as possible.



Impacts

Children and young peoples average enjoyment rating across all activities



*"It was the best thing
in the whole wide
world!"*

over
15K

15,000

Bookable sessions
for children, young
people and families

over
1,000

1,000

Children attended
community
playschemes

67

67

Children and young
people with complex
additional support
needs accessed
targeted sessions by
invitation

70%

70%

Of children and
young people
were from priority
groups*

70%

70%

Of activity took
place in priority
areas**

*Priority groups: Children and young people who are: care experienced, living in Priority areas, in receipt of free school meals, have additional support needs or are the siblings of children with additional support needs and young carers.

** Priority areas (Northfield, Tillydrone/Seaton or Torry)



CONNECTIONS

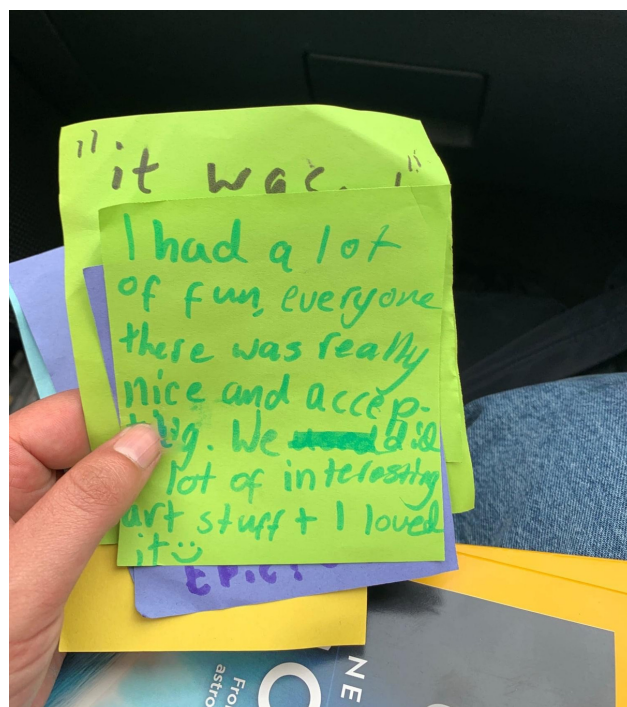
Summer of Play provided opportunities to (re)connect with friends, peers, wider community and the outdoors, as well as with trusted adults.

"I can't wait to come back and play with my new friends" – Street Football, AFCCT

Favourite part – ***"Getting to do something with my friends for real"*** – Citymoves

"Good for social skills, social interaction, meeting children they don't know and doing something that they love."

"Just what children are needing after the last summer - getting them out and socialising with each other" -parent Art Week



OPPORTUNITIES

Summer of Play provided opportunities for children and young people to play, be active and enjoy themselves. Activities were wide ranging and inclusive to cover all interests, backgrounds and circumstances and were shaped around a theme of fun and play with a view to providing positive experiences. Activities included: sports; expressive arts; science and technology, nature, outdoor play and learning, play schemes. Time outdoors was optimised.

***"Really, really good,
for children to be able
to do what they love."***

-parent



***"My son had an absolute blast,
first time at transition extreme
and trying something new.
Without the summer of
play he wouldn't have had this
opportunity.
Lunch after was great too."***



***"Some days they are bored
and watch tv, they are refreshed
here, fun and games, practical
and creative ,their creative side
comes out, it is great."-parent***



EQUITY

Activities were accessible to target families and barriers to participation were mitigated as far as possible. Consideration was given to meet wider needs, including through the integration of food, childcare, financial inclusion, family support and referral on to wider services where needed.

“Some of the activities that we were able to offer through SOP funding have a high cost to run, so therefore quite a high cost to the participant. An example would be our week long holiday camps or our outdoor adventurous activities. SOP funding allowed these to be free to participants from targeted groups and allowed them to access and enjoy them.” – Sport Aberdeen

*“Children with ASN who have no access to any childcare were able to come for the day, parents commented on how much they appreciated being able to use the service, for some it took pressure off other family members when the parents were working, for others it provided a routine something which Autistic children struggle with in holiday periods (lack of routine)”
– ACC Out of School Care*

*“As well as all the activities we were able to put on we were able to feed the children every single day. They were provided with a sandwich, a juice, and a snack every day over the three days. We know this will have made an incredible impact for the families.”
– Kings Church Aberdeen*



**“Thank you for
making
us so welcome”
— parent**

ENGAGEMENT

Existing trusted relationships and communication methods were utilised so that children and families knew about the offer and were encouraged to engage with it.

In addition to the Summer of Play social media campaign, information went out through all schools with partners and schools also sharing activities and how to book through their social media. The Summer of Play webpage has had a total of 21,000 unique visits since go live. Social media engagement ahead of the bookings opening was at 8.3% which is 6% above average campaigns.

The Customer Contact Centre was available to support bookings where there were barriers to accessing online. Booking was initially open for staff across education, social work, and communities to book activities on behalf of priority families. Partners used social media to promote any places that became available at short notice, and ACC staff worked to match opportunities to waiting lists.



Spotlight on activity

- **Environmental**-Duthie Park Rangers
- **Sport**-Sport Aberdeen/ We Too! /AFCCT
- **Additional Support Needs**- Countesswells ASN play scheme
- **Science**-Tech fest/ Aberdeen Science Centre
- **Arts** -Art week

"Today was epic!"

"It was great though I'm tired now"



Environment

Duthie Park Rangers



Exploring the Community Garden in Duthie Park and learning about senses with the Duthie Park Rangers!

The Duthie Park Ranger Service delivered environmentally themed sessions for children aged 3-7 and 8-12 years old! Children had fun while learning about recycling, planting, birds, minibeasts, pollinators and senses! Children have made their own recycled paper, scented playdough, bug hotels and bird feeders, planted vegetables to take home, went on scavenger hunts, minibeast, pollinator and bird spots, and so much more!

"I wanted to thank the rangers at Duthie Park. We had a great time with the sensory session. It was very well organised, and staff were so welcoming and helpful. Resources were pitched at a great level for my son"

"I rate the art project 10/10 because you really help me unite my sense of imagination"

"We really enjoyed the minibeast session today - bug hotel now set up in garden. Thank you for organising!"

"I loved it, I now know how to draw a tree"



The rainy weather did not stop us from going on a bird hunt at Duthie Park this summer as part of Summer of Play!

Sports Sport Aberdeen



Sport Aberdeen provided a vast array of dynamic activities for children and young people covering learning to swim, canoeing and paddle boarding and drier activities like BMXing and snow sports. In partnership with We Too, there were relaxed sessions for children with additional support needs who embraced tubing, ice skating and gymnastics

"The Summer of Play program provided the opportunity for children across Aberdeen to participate in a large variety of activities. Hopefully this has ensured there was an activity on offer for everyone and provided many families and young people with fun and memorable experiences this Summer."
- Kirsty MacIver- Project Activator (Holiday Activities)

"The Outdoor Sport and Play sessions provided a great opportunity for children to learn some new games and meet some new people. It was lovely to see the children taking part and trying new things."
- Claire Duncan- Summer of Play Outdoor Sport and Play Coach

"My boys said it was a wonderful day. Wonderful caregivers. Everything organized neatly and pleasantly and the most important thing is the satisfaction of children and smiles on their faces, even seeing that they are tired. Thank you very much for everything and we will definitely come back." -Parent

"We really enjoyed the badminton. Our son said he thought he liked it better because we were able to play as a family all together. Would definitely do it again."

"This guy had the best time at the ASN session at Adventure Snow Sports. First time skiing & he rocked it & Bob was amazing with the kids!"



5975

sessions across different sports

3006

taken up by priority groups

Sports AFC Community Trust



Inspired by Euro 2020 children and young people got stuck into football skills, game and other play at ground in Torry, Tillydrone, Seaton and Northfield. AFCCT staff recall the sportsmanship and leadership of one young person who was a great role model for his peers.

AFCCT's Street Football and Free play sessions, have been running through the week at Tullos School since the end of June. These sessions have been attended by a young person who will be starting in S1 at Harlaw Academy after the summer break.

"He has attended near enough every session since the start of the programme, often alongside his younger brother. Like many of the young people attending the Summer of Play programme, he is a keen footballer and has spent much of his time in Tullos' fantastic Cruyff Court playing several street football games, from cuppy to penalty shoot outs. When asked, he told me that our programme has given him the opportunity "to play football with new people" as well as some of his friends from Primary, and that he has really enjoyed the relaxed, young person-led nature of the sessions.

Having led the sessions since week one, it's great to hear that he has enjoyed his time with AFCCT, however something else has provided me with great satisfaction over recent weeks. Throughout the course of the programme I have watched him develop and exercise some impressive leadership skills to the point that having him in our sessions is like having another member of staff present at times.

He now regularly takes responsibility for organising teams for football matches, looks to include younger and less able players into activities and, as an example from last week, now actively encourages other participants to help tidy away equipment at the end of our sessions. Both myself and many of my AFCCT colleagues that have been present at Tullos this summer believe that working with him has been their highlight of the programme – he is a great role model for those around him and he should be immensely proud of his efforts. I think that this story reiterates that programmes like this really do bring out the best in our young people!"

- AFCCT coach Murray Collie



ASN Countesswells Holiday Club

Aberdeen City Council's out of school care provided holiday playscheme provision for 24 children with Additional Support Needs and siblings. The ASN childcare provision has run over 5 weeks at Countesswells School, the children attending have had lots of fun and tried new activities indoors and out including cooking and baking and circus skills.



"I love holiday club because we made soup Yum Yum" – Emma xx

"Holiday Club was good because we made brownies and chocolate Krispies & we can go outside" – Chloe (13)

Danny & Ashley making flat bread for snack.

"We had lots of fun outside exploring the grounds and playing on the equipment."

- Max & Eun-Hee

"We went for a walk to Hazelhead Park and played in the park" – Ashley



"We had a visit from Scott with his Circus Workshop and learned some circus skills like plate spinning and juggling, it was great fun." -Selpon & David

STEM

Aberdeen Science Centre & TechFest



Aberdeen Science Centre's team had an amazing Summer of Play! Their specially designed outdoor workshop "Survival of the Scientist" was delivered in local parks and playing fields, in partnership with Aberdeen City Council's Family Learning. Activities included a treasure hunt, measuring the height of a tree, a touch of geology and meteorology and of course, slime. In addition to our outdoors fun, we also invited 800 people to visit our facilities in Aberdeen Science Centre.

"Great fun, lots of great experiments"

"Awesome, fun, active and incredible"

TechFest developed a programme of events called Sociable Science specifically following the feedback received from families and in discussion with ACC Education. The aim of Sociable Science was to engage all ages in science activities that are done in conversation utilising teamwork, creativity and most of all fun while learning. Each activity was designed to be repeated at home with our audiences being encouraged to share what they have learnt with others. We took the Programme out to 5 locations across Aberdeen City, these were chosen by the City Council as being in areas which would most benefit from the play scheme.

"take all my electronics away, I could spend all day doing this!"

"I've really enjoyed running a stall at TechFest's 'Summer of Play' events. The joy and enthusiasm of the young children was so nice to see and certain moments have definitely stuck with me. It was such a highlight of the day when siblings or friends would try out the Music Making Glasses experiment together – loudly and passionately! Many were totally mesmerized and desperate to try it at home or show their relatives." -Rory

Arts and Creativity

Art Week - Creative Learning



Creative Learning, ACC delivered Art Week 'Party and life skills for our new world' offering different art forms each day for 3-16 year olds. All sessions started with getting to know each other games and focused on imagination, creativity and fun.

"I liked the variety of the type of art you could do"

"I had fun and was able to express myself as a person in art and meeting new people :)"

As the week has gone on, it has become apparent that these sessions have also had an immense effect on the parents / carers / grannies too! They spent a lot of time socialising, chatting and being supportive of each other. Some said - "it was not what I was expecting . . . it was so much better" - "The activities were so different" - "Where do you get all those amazing ideas?" - Creative Practitioner

"My son is an only child and has benefitted hugely from interacting with a group of children today. I was surprised how quickly he engaged with a group of children he'd never met before as he is usually quite shy. Thank you."

"Art in particular is good for mental health, it's a creative outlet and something we wouldn't do at home"

- parent



Reflections

Summer of Play has:

- Provided opportunities for children and young people to develop important life skills
- Provided opportunities for children and young people to mix out with their family, friendship, and school groups, which has been lacking due to Covid-19, building confidence and new friendships as a result
- Connected partner organisations to new audiences from priority groups and wider, with families booking on to other activities beyond Summer of Play
- Further identified the need for ASN playschemes over holiday periods
- Summer of Play provided in excess of 3805 hrs of additional paid employment and supported organisations to reinstate opportunities for volunteers, especially across community playschemes
- Demonstrated the appetite and need for free activities for children and young people

Thank you

Thank you to all the partners who made Summer of Play happen in Aberdeen;

Aberdeen City Libraries, Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust, Aberdeen Lads Club, Aberdeen Play Forum, Aberdeen Science Centre, Aberlour Options, ACC Music Service, Adventure Aberdeen, Balnagask Community Centre, Barnardo's Aberdeen Young Carers, Citymoves, Countesswells Holiday Club, Countryside Ranger, Creative Learning, Cultivate Aberdeen, Cummings Park Community Centre, Duthie Park Rangers, Family Learning, Fit Like Hubs, Grampian Autistic Society, Jesus House-Torry, Kings Church Foundation, Mastrick Community Centre, NESCol, Northfield Community Centre, Northfield Congregational Church, Orchard Brae Specialist Playscheme and Holiday Fun Club, Sport Aberdeen, Techfest, Tesco Hub Project, We Too.

Summer of Play support provided by Aberdeen city council staff across Integrated Children's and Family Service, Early Intervention and Community Empowerment, Customer Experience and Corporate Landlord.

#AbdnSummerof Play



Aberdeen City Music... · 09/07/2021

Well we have had an absolutely fantastic week running activities as part of [#abdnsummerofplay](#) Here are some of the young people who attended with their violins! [#aberdeenlearns](#) [#SummerOfPlay](#)



6 likes



Aberdeen City Cou... · 14/07/2021

"Summer of Play is fantastic." Make every moment count this summer, there are great free activities available for all. From canoeing in Rubislaw Quarry to creative learning, what have you signed up for? [orlo.uk/jids3w](#) [#abdnsummerofplay](#)



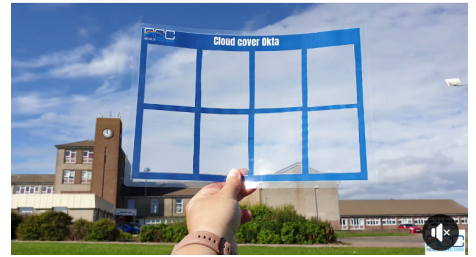
737 views, 2 comments, 5 shares, 10 likes



Aberdeen Science Centre

4 Aug

That's a wrap on our summer 'Survive the Park' workshops. ... See more



Creative Learning @C... · 30/07/2021

Summer Of Play day 5 - printmaking. Bags, beams and further proof there's more than one way to use a potato. Absolutely stunning and what an amazing week we've all had. Thank you everyone!

[#AbdnSummerOfPlay](#)
[#CreativeLearning](#)
[#CultureAberdeen](#)
[#GetIntoSummer](#)



2 likes



Family Learning Aberdeen

30 Jul

[#abdnsummerofplay](#)



Helen Family-Learning is with Ruth Family-Learning and Caroline Learning.

30 Jul

We had a great morning at the beach. We played a game what Caroline says, beach scavange hunt our art gallery, stone... See more



We Too SC045895 is at Innoflate Aberdeen.

18 Jul · Aberdeen

Bouncing out of the weekend! 🤪

Thank you so much to everyone that ca... See more



13 likes, 7 comments, 2 shares, 674 views



Aberdeen City Cou... · 25/06/2021

Its the holidays! Well done to all our pupils, after another challenging term we couldn't be prouder of how they have adapted, so now its time to PLAY! There are still spaces available on our summer of play activities. To book visit; [orlo.uk/pCxes](#) [#abdnsummerofplay](#)



4 shares, 13 likes



Aberdeen Play Forum

26 Jul

☀️ We love popping up at the Alan Douglas play park in Northfield! Some great loose parts play on another fine sunny morning! We had a... See more



We Too SC045895

26 Jul

Just the boost our wee team of Ninjas need this morning!

... See more



SPORTABERDEEN.CO.UK
Local charities creating opportunities for children of all abilities to get active this summer | Sport & Acti...

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) on Curriculum for Excellence
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/187
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report aims to provide Elected Members with oversight of the published OECD report which was instructed by Scottish Government to help assess the impact of Curriculum for Excellence.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:-

- 2.1 note the contents of this report; and
- 2.2 instruct the Chief Education Officer to continue to keep Committee apprised of resultant changes in Scottish Government policy; and
- 2.3 instruct the Chief Education Officer to keep Committee updated of how changed national policies are being implemented locally.

3.0 Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence INTO THE FUTURE – An OECD Report

- 3.1.1 In 2020, Scottish Government invited the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Organisation (OECD) to assess the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in primary and secondary schools. The assessment was undertaken by the OECD Implementing Education Policies team, which conducts comparative analysis of education policy implementation and offers tailored support to help countries in the design and effective implementation of their education policies.
- 3.1.2 This report presents the findings of the reviewers based on their analysis of documentation, academic literature and experiences from other OECD countries; and on group interviews, school visits and events conducted online with stakeholders from across Scotland. One Aberdeen City Council secondary school contributed to the review.

3.2 The Findings

- 3.2.1 The OECD report was published on 21st July 2021 and is available in Appendix A. The review finds that Curriculum for Excellence continues to offer a vision and a philosophy of education widely supported and worth pursuing but highlights 12 recommendations for consideration.
- 3.2.2 The OECD team who conducted the review note that there are too many agencies/groups involved in shaping the curriculum and that their roles and remits are unclear. Reviewers recommend that a standalone agency for the curriculum be established and that this will require a review of the remits of current agencies such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland. Current confusion around remits has resulted in key messages around the curriculum being lost as other key initiatives such as the National Improvement Framework and the work of Regional Improvement Collaboratives have been driven forward. OECD recommend that communications about the curriculum need to be stronger, clearer and more accessible and believe that national structures around the curriculum need to be simplified. Reviewers also note that stakeholders with responsibilities should have the capacity and resource to match their responsibilities and that duplication should be avoided.
- 3.2.3 OECD noted that the unclear remits around curriculum have resulted in a plethora of guidance on curriculum being available which are both overwhelming and unhelpful.
- 3.2.4 Assessment, and particularly assessment across the senior phase, features heavily in the report. The report notes that there is a need to fully implement Building the Curriculum 5 across the senior phase and identified the significant and unhelpful changes which occur from the mostly formative assessment in the Broad General Education to the traditional single stage and subject exams in the Senior Phase. The authors note that assessment practices in the senior phase constitute a, '**clash between 19th century assessments and a 21st century curriculum**'. This area is considered more fully in a working paper entitled 'Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective (Appendix B)'. The working paper provides some helpful additional context on why some national education systems continue to rely on a formal exam diet and suggests that teacher judgement should have more weighting as we move forward.
- 3.2.5 The OECD Report suggests that the senior phase should be considered fully to ensure that depth is realised through interdisciplinary and specialised disciplinary knowledge. Offering a core set of courses which are supplemented depending on the aspirations of young people may help better realise the vision of Curriculum for Excellence. Reviewers go on to state that this could see a range of changes in:
- pedagogical and assessment practices
 - collaboration and co-design with Further and Higher education
 - consideration of portfolio approaches and rubrics with flexible, formative and continuous assessment at the heart of the senior phase rather than exams
 - greater use of digital opportunities for feedback and feedforward
 - strengthened teacher judgement to build on recent progress in this area.
- 3.2.6 OECD propose that typical senior phase pathways which capitalise on a small number of compulsory courses could be defined nationally, this national work would enable schools to supplement with specialist courses and options. There is also a need to

more clearly define the knowledge required by learners and to carefully consider how best to ensure breadth and depth in learning.

- 3.2.7 The lack of an on-going evaluation strategy was highlighted as an area of considerable concern. Reviewers noted that the lack of any formal review has limited the ability of the curriculum to take account of emerging trends which would have been picked up through periodic review. The OECD go onto note that measures used to judge the impact of the education system should reflect the 4 capacities of Curriculum for Excellence and not only those of being a successful learner currently in place. Their view is that a more holistic and accurate evaluation framework will help the system better understand progress and identify next steps. The highly politicised nature of education was also seen as unhelpful at times and the reviewers noted that a clear evaluation strategy encompassing periodic reviews could help to guide change in a more manageable way.
- 3.2.8 The reviewers also noted that '**efforts to reduce the attainment gap will not be possible solely through schooling – we need coalitions with housing, welfare and health policy**' which raises further questions around how to measure and judge the system as we move forward. The work driven locally through the Community Planning Partnership seeks to reduce inequalities in education and employment opportunities, which are most acute for those families living under the grip of poverty. Through early intervention and prevention we aim to create conditions for prosperity and support future generations to be prepared and made ready for school, work and adulthood. The LOIP has a focus on supporting children and families living in poverty, care experienced children and young offenders/children of offenders because their levels of risk are very much higher than those of other children and young people of their age. This involves the education service working together with housing, communities, health, social work, welfare and justice to shape policy and affect change. Coalitions are already well established locally.
- 3.2.9 The OECD noted that despite extensive engagement being undertaken with stakeholders there is a lack of clarity around the extent to which consultations had informed final policy. They noted that consultation should draw on all levels of the system and that the feedback loop must be clearer. In general terms the OECD suggest less consultations but with a clearer feedback loop.
- 3.2.9 The need for research (at school and wider system level) was identified as necessary to help shape future innovations. OECD conclude that there should be no more prescriptions from above, changes should be practitioner led with horizontal collaboration so that those at classroom level can drive and shape change beyond their own department and school. The OECD noted that a 'top down' approach would not realise improvement.
- 3.2.11 The need to invest in curriculum capacity was highlighted in order to ensure that practitioners have the time they need to undertake school- based research and drive innovation. The OECD also noted the need to ensure adequate time for the recording of pupil progress and moderation of professional judgements.

3.2 Next steps

- 3.3.1 The Scottish Government has accepted all 12 recommendations in the report and has published how it intends to take them forward on the following link. [Curriculum for Excellence: Scottish Government response to OECD Review](#). Scottish Government has confirmed that pupils taking national qualifications this year and next will not be affected and will take decisions on how to progress work around assessment in the senior phase following publication of the working paper in Appendix B. The Scottish Government has confirmed a planned exam diet for 21/22 school session.
- 3.3.2 The Scottish Education Council will be reconvened. The Council will have a refreshed membership, including young people, and a renewed purpose to support the delivery of the OECD's recommendations.
- 3.3.3 A new Children and Young People's Education Council will also be created to ensure that the voices of those who are most affected by any changes in education are always heard in strategic discussions.
- 3.3.4 Professor Ken Muir CBE, who was until recently Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, will lead work to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with a new specialist agency for both curriculum and assessment. Further consideration of changes to the qualifications and assessment system will be heavily informed by the next OECD report, expected by the end of August. His remit is detailed in the following link. [Reform of the SQA and Education Scotland: advisor draft remit](#).
- 3.3.5 Professor Muir and an advisory panel will also look at reforms to Education Scotland, including removing the function of inspection from the agency.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Standards In Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 places an obligation on Local Authorities to secure improvement in all schools. The OECD report will change expectations of school staff and influence how the quality of schools is determined in the future.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	School leaders and school staff being unprepared for changed expectations.	L	Culture of collaboration well established to help share the workload.
Compliance	Failure to deliver on any changed expectations.	L	Discussions regarding the OECD report with HTs and wider teams are planned – a collaborative approach to

			ensuring readiness will be taken.
Operational	Risk of employees feeling overwhelmed by change.	L	Support in place from the Local Authority Education Service and culture of collaboration already well established. Potential to simplify expectations.
Financial	N/A		
Reputational	Risk of reputational damage for school and service, especially if changes are not well communicated.	L	Information to be shared with parents and carers routinely.
Environment / Climate	N/A		

7. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Children who have their learning and wellbeing needs well met are more able to contribute to a prosperous economy
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Children and young people who have their learning and wellbeing needs met are more likely to have fulfilling and more independent lives, as such this report closely aligns to all the children's stretch outcomes in the LOIP.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A - OECD Report.

Appendix B – OECD Working Paper

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

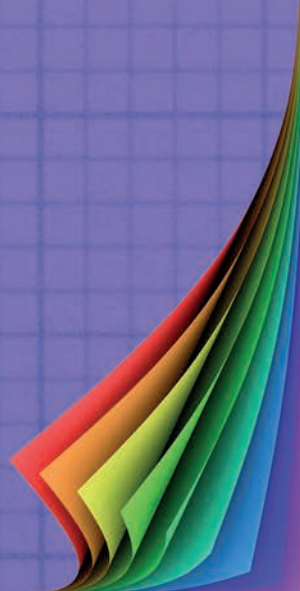
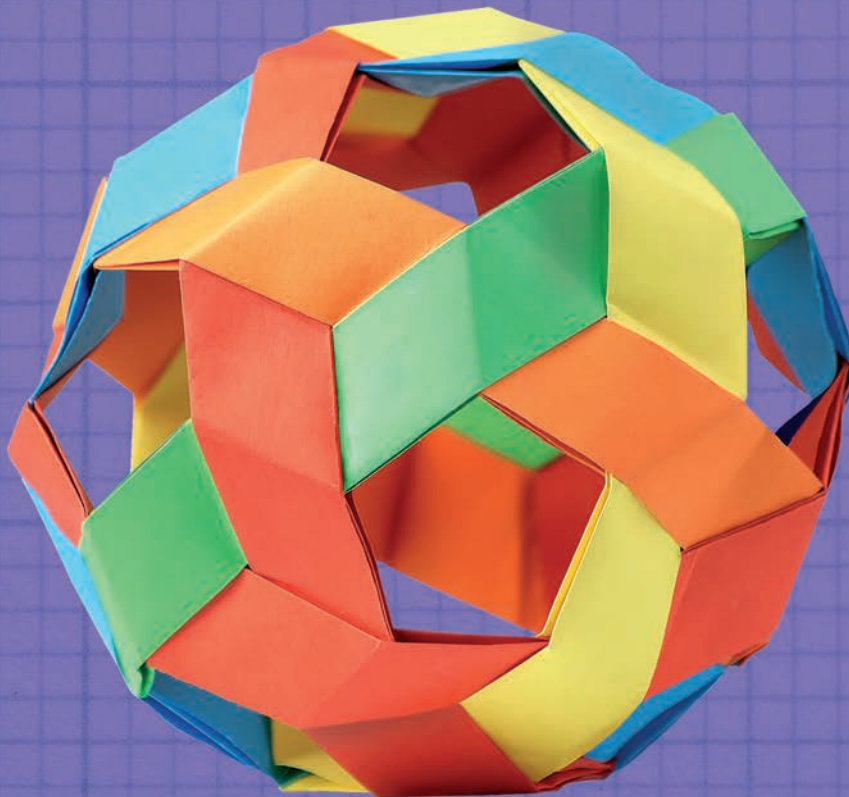
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Implementing Education Policies

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

INTO THE FUTURE



Implementing Education Policies

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

INTO THE FUTURE



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Foreword

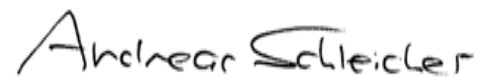
Scotland (United Kingdom) was among the first education systems to embrace the 21st century learning movement, when it reformed its curriculum policy in the early 2000s. Following a large-scale public debate, *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) was published in 2004 and would be developed over the subsequent years, before being phased into schools from 2010/2011 onwards. CfE aims for students to grow into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Based on this common philosophy, primary and secondary schools develop their own curriculum to help students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

Systems worldwide are coming together with help from international organisations such as the OECD, to design and implement future-oriented curricula that aspire to the highest international standards of quality in education, while also responding to national and local challenges. Students, educators and policy makers internationally face the challenge of determining both what one needs to learn today in order to thrive into tomorrow, and how to organise and operate school systems to enable this learning. As a pioneer, Scotland has been tackling these issues, testing solutions and exchanging with peers for over a decade. The current report provides one more opportunity for countries to learn from Scotland's inspiring experience.

In 2020, Scotland invited the OECD to assess the implementation of CfE in primary and secondary schools to understand how school curricula have been designed and implemented in recent years. This was undertaken by the OECD Implementing Education Policies team, which conducts comparative analysis of education policy implementation and offers tailored support to help countries in the design and effective implementation of their education policies. This report builds on the analysis of documentation, academic literature and experiences from other OECD countries; and on group interviews, school visits and events conducted online with stakeholders from across Scotland.

The report assesses the progress made with CfE since 2015, and proposes recommendations aimed to support Scotland as it further enhances CfE to achieve its potential for learners. The OECD team finds that CfE continues to offer a vision and a philosophy of education widely supported and worth pursuing. Its design offers the flexibility needed for a few adjustments to further improve the learners' journey, if schools and teachers receive adequate support from the system. Engagement lies at the heart of CfE and offers the possibility, with better structure, for stakeholders to take shared responsibility for the policy while guaranteeing its effective leadership. The report also acknowledges the efforts made to enhance the coherence of the policy environment with CfE, and proposes ways to strengthen this coherence. Overall, this report suggests CfE still offers great potential for learners, which Scotland can fulfil by adopting a more structured and strategic approach to curriculum review and implementation. Just as Scotland's Curriculum

for Excellence was among the pioneers of 21st century learning, its most recent developments hold valuable lessons for other education systems and their own curriculum policies.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andreas Schleicher". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Andreas Schleicher
Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General
Director for Education and Skills

Acknowledgements

This assessment was commissioned jointly by the Scottish Government and Parliament. The OECD team is indebted to John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in the Scottish Government, for his support throughout the assessment process, and to Clare Adamson, Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) and Convener of the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament, for the Committee's availability to engage as part of the assessment. We are grateful for the invaluable support, contributions and guidance from the Scottish Government Learning Directorate officials and staff. In particular, the team would like to thank Julie Anderson, Maggie Young, and Anna Stansfield of the Learning Directorate for co-ordinating the process.

The assessment benefitted from the contributions of the officials and education experts from across Scotland's education system, who shared their knowledge with the OECD team during the assessment and provided feedback on this report. We would like to particularly acknowledge the valuable contributions and feedback provided by the members of the Scottish Practitioner Forum. We are also grateful for the contributions of officials from governance committees and advisory boards, public agencies, and local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

The OECD team thanks all the participants in the assessment visits (see Annex B), starting with the headteachers, teachers, students and parents of the schools who made time to meet with us during a challenging school year. We thank the scholars, researchers, non-governmental organisations, unions and professional associations, and all the bodies and individuals who kindly shared their views, experience and knowledge with us. The courtesy extended to us throughout our virtual visits to Scotland (United Kingdom) always made these challenging visits the more instructive and enjoyable.

The OECD team who conducted the assessment and co-authored this report was composed of Beatriz Pont, Senior Policy Analyst at the OECD, Romane Viennet, Policy Analyst at the OECD, Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean of Dublin City University's Institute of Education, and Professor Jan van den Akker, University of Twente (Annex A). The OECD team acknowledges the support from the OECD Secretariat, and particularly from Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills; Paulo Santiago, Head of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division; and Miho Taguma, Ester Carvalhaes, José-Luis Alvarez-Galván, Pierre Gouëdard and Rebecca Santos of the Directorate for Education and Skills, who provided in-depth feedback, advice and support at critical stages of the development of the report. Precious support was provided by Jacqueline Frazer, who prepared the report for publication and provided administrative support; by Rachel Linden, who organised the publication process; and by Catherine Bremer, Cassandra Davis, Claire Marguerettaz, Lawrence Pacewicz, and Mia Tuzovic, who provided additional counsel.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
AHDS	Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland
BGE	Broad General Education
CAB	Curriculum and Assessment Board
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CLD	Community learning and development
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (2019)
CPD	Continuous professional development
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EIS	Education Institute of Scotland
EME	English Medium Education
ESCS	Index of economic, social and cultural status
Es and Os	Experiences and Outcomes
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIRFEC	Getting it right for every child
GME	Gaelic Medium Education
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HE	Higher education
HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
ICEA	International Council of Education Advisers
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	Information technology
ITE	Initial teacher education
LAs	Local authorities
MSPs	Members of Scottish Parliament

NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NIF	National Improvement Framework
NPA	National Progression Award
NPFS	National Parent Forum of Scotland
NQ	National Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGDE	Professional Graduate Diploma in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSE	Personal and Social Education
RICs	Regional Improvement Collaboratives
RMPS	Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEC	Scottish Education Council
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SFR	Standard for Full Registration
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SLS	School Leaders Scotland
SNP	Scottish National Party
SNSA	Scottish National Standardised Assessments
SPR	Standard for Provisional Registration
SSOT	Single source of truth
SSTA	Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Executive summary

Curriculum for Excellence in context

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) offers an inspiring and widely supported philosophy of education. Its framework allows for effective curricular practices and for the possibility of a truly fulfilling education for learners. Building upon its commitment to education quality, Scotland can make adjustments within CfE's flexible framework to achieve its potential for learners present and future.

Students in Scotland engage in learning through CfE, which aims to provide a holistic, coherent, and future-oriented approach to learning between 3 and 18 years and lets schools design their curriculum based on a common framework. CfE's approach was designed in 2004 and started rolling out in schools in 2010.

The Scottish Government invited the OECD to assess the implementation of CfE, to understand how curricula are designed and implemented in schools, and to identify what can be improved for CfE to continue delivering quality learning for all students.

The OECD assessment looks at the Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase from an implementation perspective. The analysis was undertaken following standard OECD methodology, including desk-based policy analysis, interviews with stakeholders, school visits, exchanges with a practitioner's forum, and comparative analysis based on research and international practices. All visits and meetings occurred online due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions.

Key findings

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence continues to be a bold and widely supported initiative, and its design offers the flexibility needed to improve student learning further

CfE's vision to achieve excellence for all students is widely shared by stakeholders and continues to be an inspiring example equated with good curriculum practice internationally. The two decades since the formulation of CfE's vision have been marked by accelerated changes, including in educational research, giving rise to new insights into student learning, pedagogy, and the kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to progress as learners. CfE has stood the test of time, but it will only remain relevant if Scotland uses these insights to continue its development.

CfE's complex framework works well in BGE and for learners taking Advanced Highers, where the concepts, pedagogical and learning approaches are coherent, and the implemented school curricula seem consistent with policy intentions. However, there is some ambiguity about the role of knowledge and ways of knowing in a 21st century curriculum framework. Adjustments might therefore be needed in the concepts of CfE and the tools to put them in practice in both BGE and the Senior Phase. The structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the Senior Phase also need adapting to be consistent with CfE's vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised from 3 to 18.

Teachers are well-trained and respected professionals in Scotland, and school leaders have developed strong pedagogical leadership capacities. Both are committed to varied teaching approaches for student learning and have proven their ability to develop schools' own curricula. Curriculum design and continuous improvement require time and professional investment, which schools can only achieve with ongoing support from the system.

Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence and offers the possibility, with better structure, for shared ownership and effective leadership of CfE

Significant efforts were made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which contributed to wide support for CfE as a direction of travel for Scottish education. However, there is a gap between stakeholders' involvement and their impact on effective enhancements to CfE implementation.

Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for the conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework. At the same time, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with many lacking clarity on their responsibilities.

Scotland successfully developed an education language to support the philosophy of CfE that made its way into daily discussions of education policy makers, teachers and learners alike, thanks to communication efforts by system leaders. But the constant production and recycling of documentation was often described as "overwhelming", and the terminology used too technical and open to interpretation.

Continued efforts are needed to enhance the coherence of the policy environment with Curriculum for Excellence

CfE's originality continues to influence international curriculum policy. Scotland made great progress in developing and supporting teachers' capacity to be curriculum makers, and the capacity of school leaders to lead the curriculum process in their schools. This work has become challenging for schools considering the multiple new policy initiatives; and Scotland's comparatively high rate of teachers' class contact time and its expectations for teachers to lead and plan curriculum locally.

Other education policies were developed to build a coherent system around CfE's innovative philosophy. However, work remains on striking a balance between autonomy with CfE and equity for students and aligning and simplifying the many initiatives. Early policy developments showed promise to align student assessment, qualification practices and system evaluation to CfE's philosophy. The 2010 Framework for Assessment was hailed internationally as an exemplar. Despite attempts to reform qualifications, misalignment between CfE's aspirations and the qualification system became a barrier to CfE's implementation in secondary education. Additionally, the data generated by current system monitoring seem limited to fully support CfE's ambitions.

Education is a source of pride in Scotland, which shows in the broad commitment to CfE and educational excellence for all. It has been granted great importance in the political debate to a degree that would be the envy of many a system. This importance has sometimes translated into a busy system at risk of policy and institutional overload. The centrality of education in the political debate, allied with the absence of an identified cycle of policy review, has resulted in a reactive and oftentimes political approach, which is not the most efficient way to address issues with CfE.

The approach to the ongoing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence has lacked structure and long-term perspective

The Curriculum and Assessment Board and predecessors provided the opportunity to engage stakeholders, get feedback and develop agreements on CfE's developments. Schools and local authorities

were afforded significant autonomy to shape CfE, possibly building capacity on the ground. Yet, CfE has lacked a structured approach to plan its developments with a longer-term perspective.

Recommendations for next steps: Focus on student learning progress

Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from 3 to 18 years

- **Re-assess CfE’s aspirational vision against emerging trends in education** to take account of evolutions in education and society: Scotland should consider updates to some of its vision’s core elements and their implications for practice, in particular, the role of knowledge in CfE; and define indicators aligned to the vision to help understand students’ progress across all four capacities set out in CfE.
- **Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE** to deliver Scotland’s commitment to providing all learners with a rich learning experience throughout school education: Scotland could consider how the design of CfE can better help learners consolidate a common base of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the end of BGE, and nurture and hone this base for them to progress seamlessly through Senior Phase and the choices it offers.
- **Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE:** Scotland could consider adapting the pedagogical and assessment practices and the structure of learning pathways in the Senior Phase to enhance learners’ experience of upper-secondary education and help them develop CfE’s four capacities continuously.
- **Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research** by developing the environment of curriculum design support around schools, including in supporting exchange and collaboration between practitioners for curriculum design and experimentation within and across schools; and collaboration between schools and universities.

Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities

- **Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE:** System leaders at national and local levels could continue encouraging the involvement of stakeholders (and in particular, students) with CfE by better structuring each engagement initiative they offer, clarifying its purpose, designing it accordingly, and letting stakeholder input inform decision making.
- **Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE:** System leaders and stakeholders could revise the current allocation of responsibility for CfE, including responsibilities for its strategic direction, its reviews and updates, and the response to schools’ needs of support with curriculum issues. The revised allocation should be stable over time to fulfil Scotland’s commitment to shared ownership of CfE.
- **Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE:** System leaders, with the Learning Directorate and Education Scotland at the forefront, could develop a communication strategy in support of CfE’s next developments and collaborate with practitioners, scholars and other CfE stakeholders as they do so.

Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change

- **Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level:** In support of the next phase of development of CfE, Scotland could consider the provision of additional dedicated and ring-fenced time for all teachers, for curriculum planning, for monitoring of student achievement and in support of moderation of assessment outcomes.

- **Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence:** To align the institutional structures with clear ownership of CfE, Scotland could explore assigning leadership and development responsibilities for curriculum (and perhaps assessment) to a specialist stand-alone agency; and consider refreshing the remit of an inspectorate of education regarding CfE.
- **Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5*:** Scotland could first identify modes of student assessment that could be used in school and external settings at Senior Phase levels, in alignment with the four capacities and CfE philosophy; and second, re-develop a sample-based evaluation system to collect robust and reliable data necessary to support curriculum reviews and decision making.
- **Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review:** Scotland could consider establishing a systematic curriculum review cycle with a planned timeframe and specific review agenda, led by the specialist stand-alone agency.

Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view

- **Adopt a structured and long-term approach to implementation:** Building on the system's existing strengths, Scotland should consider how to take on board the recommendations in this report as a coherent package rather than individual policy actions for the next steps.

1

The Scottish education system in context

This chapter presents an overview of the education system in Scotland (United Kingdom) and introduces the background to the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). It describes the framework and methodology used by the OECD team to assess the processes and progress made with the implementation of CfE in Broad General Education and the Senior Phase and to propose possible developments in the future. Finally, it takes stock of transversal tensions around CfE that inform the analysis in the following chapters.

Introduction and methodology

In 2019, the Scottish Government invited the OECD to conduct an assessment to take stock of the implementation of its *Curriculum for Excellence* policy (CfE) and identify areas for potential development in the future to ensure that it contributes as effectively as possible to the education of young people in Scotland. This report presents the results of the assessment. It was developed as part of the OECD Implementing Education Policies programme (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Implementing Education Policies: Supporting change in education

OECD's Implementing Education Policies programme offers peer learning and tailored support for countries and jurisdictions to help them achieve success in the implementation of their education policies and reforms. Tailored support is provided on topics on which the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills has comparative expertise, including (but not limited to): introducing new curricula, developing schools as learning organisations, teacher policy, evaluation, assessment and accountability arrangements/education monitoring systems and building educational leadership capacity. The tailored support consists of three complementary strands of work that aim to target countries' and jurisdictions' needs to introduce policy reforms and impactful changes:

- Policy assessments take stock of the selected policy and change strategy, analyse strengths and challenges and provide concrete recommendations for enhancing and ensuring effective implementation. They follow a concrete methodology: a desk study of policy documents, a three to five-day assessment visit, in which an OECD team of experts interviews a range of key stakeholders from various levels of the education system, and additional exchanges with a project steering or reference group.
- Strategic advice is provided to education stakeholders and tailored to the needs of countries and jurisdictions. It can consist of reviewing policy documents (e.g. white papers or action plans), contributing to policy meetings or facilitating the development of tools that support the implementation of specific policies.
- Implementation seminars can be organised to bring together education stakeholders involved in the reform or change process for them to discuss, engage and shape the development of policies and implementation strategies.

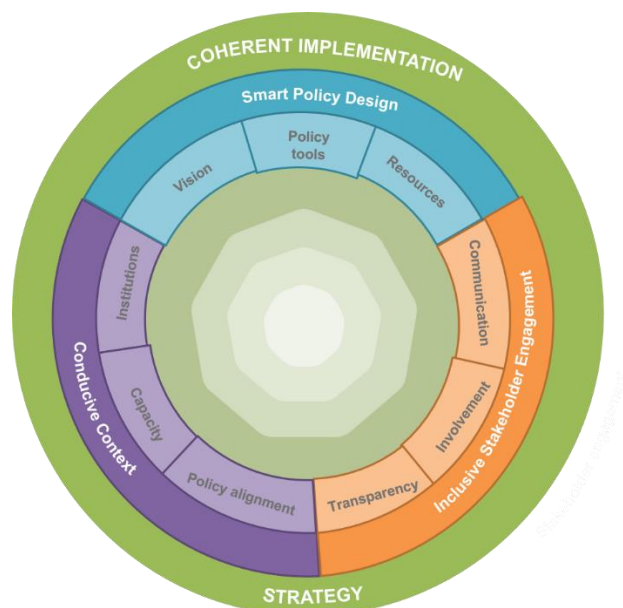
Website: <http://www.oecd.org/education/implementing-policies/>

Brochure: <http://www.oecd.org/education/implementing-education-policies-flyer.pdf>

CfE is Scotland's comprehensive curriculum policy, developed between 2004 and 2010 and first implemented in 2011. With more than 16 years since its inception, it is an opportunity to review its implementation with a focus on its future.

The OECD assessment focuses on CfE in the Broad General Education (BGE) and Senior Phase (upper-secondary education). It uses the OECD Framework on Education Policy Implementation (Figure 1.1) to review how CfE has been implemented until 2020 and provides options to consider for next steps. The framework highlights that analysing the implementation of an education policy requires looking at the dimensions of policy design, stakeholder engagement, and policy context, and how they weave together to turn policy into reality (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[1]; Gouédard et al., 2020^[2]).

Figure 1.1. The OECD Framework on Education Policy Implementation



Source: OECD, (2020^[3]), *An implementation framework for effective change in schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4fd4113f-en>.

To undertake this analysis, the OECD formed a team of OECD analysts and external experts of curriculum and assessment implementation (see Annex A), who are the authors of this report. The OECD team carried out a desk-based analysis of policy documents, evidence and research on CfE implementation. The sheer number of existing publications about CfE is a testament to the system's commitment to continuous educational improvement. Key documents in the corpus included, but were not limited to:

- A *Building the Curriculum* series and complementary policy documents developed at central and local levels.
- A previous OECD review of the Scottish education system (OECD, 2015^[4]).
- Reports and evidence submitted to Scottish Parliament commissions.
- Reports commissioned by the Scottish Government and CfE governance committees.
- The initial evidence pack compiling information and case studies on key issues of CfE and its implementation. The Scottish Government produced the document with help from key stakeholders for the OECD assessment (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).
- Published academic articles and ongoing research reports.
- Position papers and studies carried out about CfE by major stakeholders in the system.

Against the rich backdrop of existing documentation of CfE and its implementation, the OECD team conducted a series of online group interviews and virtual school visits to gather primary data. The team undertook virtual policy and school visits, including interviews with key stakeholders from across the Scottish education system and with practitioners, learners and their parents to complement the evidence base.

The team met virtually with representatives of over 40 organisations, education researchers and stakeholder committees during the first week. Additional interviews with scholars were also conducted between October and November 2020. The second week of online visits was dedicated to visiting schools and meeting with additional practitioners, learners and their parents from across Scotland, resulting in discussions with stakeholders from 14 schools in total. School visits started with a review of their curriculum model before holding meetings with school leadership, teachers, parents and learners. The group

interviews consisted of 75 minute long meetings with groups of four to eight practitioners, learners, and parents. A final stakeholder consultation event was held on line to discuss OECD preliminary findings on 16 March 2021. The detailed agenda for each mission week, additional scholar interviews and the final event can be found in Annex B.

All school visits and stakeholder interviews were conducted online due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis and travel restrictions, using secure online video-conferencing platforms and following the OECD's policy on personal data protection. Although this setting prevented the collection of observational data in school classrooms, it allowed for qualitative group interviews with learners at various stages of education and with teachers and school leaders from schools located in ten different local authorities. The OECD team checked the evidence gathered from these interviews and virtual school visits for consistency against relevant research and findings from trusted sources when they already existed, which brought additional confirmation to this report's findings.

Finally, the authors purposefully chose to analyse statistics and other quantitative data from years prior to 2020, to control for the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on Scotland's education system since the focus of this report is on trends and processes that predate the pandemic. Unless the phenomenon analysed is directly linked to the crisis, the latest school year of reference used for data is 2018-19.

This report presents the analysis and results of the OECD team analysis. It is structured as follows:

- This chapter introduces the context of the assessment, provides an overview of the Scottish education system, its performance, policies and tensions, and provides a conclusion on issues to consider for CfE policy to adjust in the future. The following chapters then analyse the dimensions central to the implementation of CfE.
- Chapter 2 analyses the design of CfE, current practices and considerations for CfE to be most effective for Scottish young people.
- Chapter 3 analyses stakeholders' engagement with CfE, how they have engaged as part of the implementation process, and how engagement could improve in the future.
- Chapter 4 analyses the policy environment of CfE and how its contextual dimensions can contribute to, or hinder, progress with CfE.
- Chapter 5 brings together the different dimensions to provide a coherent and actionable implementation perspective for the future of CfE.

The Scottish economic and social context

Scotland is a country of the United Kingdom, bordered to the south by England, to the east by the North Sea, and by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and north. Scotland has around 5.46 million people, including 1.03 million (19%) aged under 18. The Highlands, in the north and northwest of mainland Scotland, and the Borders, to the south, are sparsely populated, while the central belt accounts for the bulk of the population. Scotland also has a large number of islands, many off the west coast and with Orkney and Shetland to the north (OECD, 2015^[4]). Scotland's population is at a record high and has been growing steadily since the turn of the century. This has been driven mainly by net inward migration as opposed to births, and the population of children has declined slightly over this period (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]). The ethnic minority population of Scotland has grown rapidly over the last decade, and diversity in Scottish schools is increasing as a result. Many languages such as Polish, Urdu and Punjabi are spoken in communities and schools alongside English, as well as the heritage languages of Gaelic and Scots.

The Scottish economy is structured as most advanced economies, with services accounting for most of its economic output (about 75% in 2016) and employment. Key sectors in Scotland include oil and gas; the food industry; energy, including a growing renewable energy sector; financial services; tourism; creative

industries; and education. The Scottish economy was performing well before the COVID-19 crisis. Annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates remained positive, between 0.7% and 1.5% in 2016-19, and unemployment was at historically low levels, at 3.5% in 2019 (Scottish Government, 2019^[6]). By comparison, annual growth rates for the United Kingdom as a whole were slightly higher (between 1.2% and 2.2% in 2016-19), while the overall unemployment rate remained slightly higher (3.8% in 2019), the country being affected by the uncertainty around Brexit negotiations.

The COVID-19 crisis provoked serious contractions to the Scottish economy, as in other economies, amounting to a 21.4% fall in GDP over the first half of 2020 (latest available data), in line with the 22.1% contraction in the United Kingdom's economy overall. The impact on different economic sectors varied according to the extent of corresponding restrictions, but the fall in output was spread relatively evenly across sectors. By way of comparison, Scotland's GDP fell around 4% over six quarters during the global financial crisis. The quarterly unemployment rate for May-July 2020 increased by 0.7% compared to the similar point the previous year (Scottish Government, 2020^[7]). Around 19% (1 020 000 individuals) of the population of Scotland were in relative poverty in 2016-19 (after housing costs). Over half of those in relative poverty were in poverty despite having at least one working adult in the household. This proportion increases for children, with almost a quarter (24%, around 230 000 children) (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

At the time of writing this report, two factors influenced the political context around Scotland's education. First, parliamentary elections are planned for May 2021. As part of the United Kingdom, Scotland's politics operate under the United Kingdom's constitutional monarchy, through Scottish representation at the Parliament of the United Kingdom and within Scotland's own legislative and executive institutions. Since the Scotland Act of 1998, the Scottish Parliament took full legislative responsibility for a range of devolved competencies, including education. The Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are elected every five years, following which the leader of the party with majority support in Parliament is usually nominated candidate for First Minister and appointed by the Queen. The First Minister heads the Scottish Government, determines portfolios and appoints other ministers and cabinet secretaries with the approval of Parliament and the Queen. At the time of writing this report and before the Scottish elections planned for May 2021, the Scottish National Party (SNP) had been in power in Scotland since 2007 (including as a minority government since the 2016 Scottish elections) and had kept education as one of their top policy priorities during that time.

Second, the COVID-19 crisis. Like many countries, Scotland was hit by the COVID-19 crisis, which resulted in school closures, adaptations to the national qualification examination diets and other changes that could mark the education system for the long term. The COVID-19 pandemic was first declared to have spread in Scotland on 1 March 2020, after which schools closed on 20 March, along with several other sectors, and the 2020 national exam diet was cancelled. Scotland followed the rest of the United Kingdom into lockdown from 23 March until the end of May, when restrictions started easing. Education continued following a remote learning model until the summer, with a number of government initiatives aiming to guarantee that all students could have access to a computer and a reliable Internet connection. Schools opened again in August, with students allowed back into classrooms following safety protocols until the end of 2020. The analysis in this report focuses on CfE implementation before the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 but considers the opportunities created by key events of that year for future developments of CfE.

An overview of the Scottish education system

School education structure

The Scottish education system counts around 2 500 schools serving learners from four years old, with 96% in publicly funded local authority-managed schools. Not all schools in Scotland offer early childhood

education and care (ECEC, referred to as “early learning and childcare” in Scotland). As of May 2020, the publicly funded school system caters to 96 375 students in publicly funded ECEC; to 398 794 students in primary education; to 164 397 students in lower-secondary education; and 127 666 students in upper-secondary education. The school system employs more than 49 000 teachers (Table 1.1). Operated by non-public entities, independent schools (about 100 in 2020) provide education for over 30 000 students. In 2019, 114 publicly funded schools for special education needs were also operating, serving 7 132 students, although the majority of the students with an additional support need recorded (more than 30% of all students) attend mainstream schools. The Scottish school system also includes Gaelic Medium Education (GME), which aims for young students to learn fluently in both Gaelic and English through primary and secondary education. There are 8 stand-alone GME primary schools (out of the 2 004 total primary schools), 52 primary schools with a GME and EME (English Medium Education) stream in the same school, and 32 secondary schools that offer GME subjects (out of 358 secondary schools in total).

Table 1.1. Number of students, schools and teachers by level of education in Scotland (United Kingdom), 2020

	ECEC (Early learning and childcare), publicly funded	Primary education	Secondary education		Independent schools	Special schools
			BGE ¹	Senior Phase		
Number of students	96 375 (September 2019)	398 794	164 397	127 666	30 000	7 132
Number of schools (or ECEC centres)	2 576	2 004	358		100	114
Number of teachers or qualified staff	798 (September 2019)	25 027	23 522		..	1 927
Student-teacher ratio	..	15.9	12.4		..	3.7
Enrolment rates	98% of eligible 3-4 year-olds	x
Number of schools offering GME (either stand-alone or with EME)	..	60	32		..	x

Notes: 1: BGE stands for Broad General Education, which encompasses early learning, primary and lower-secondary education levels.

.. = missing data; x = not applicable. All data are based on the latest published data as of May 2020.

Source: Scottish Government (2021^[5]), *Curriculum for Excellence 2020-2021 - OECD review: initial evidence pack*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/oecd-independent-review-curriculum-excellence-2020-2021-initial-evidence-pack/> [accessed on 24 March 2021].

According to the Scottish Government’s classification of school locations, 31% of the students attending publicly funded schools went to a school in a large urban area, and 42% attend schools in smaller urban areas. The remaining 27% attend schools in accessible small towns (9%), remote small towns (5%), accessible rural areas (8%) and remote rural areas (4%) (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

The school system is organised in sequential levels summarised in Table 1.2. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) caters for children aged 3 to 18 years, beyond the boundaries of compulsory education (ages 5-16 in Scotland). ECEC is provided for those up to five years of age (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] 0), and while it is not compulsory, 98% of eligible children aged three and four are registered in 2020. Children aged three to four are entitled to 20 hours per week of unconditional free access to ECEC, which is fewer than most OECD countries (OECD, 2020^[8]). At the time of drafting this report, the Scottish Government was phasing in an expansion that will almost double this hourly entitlement for early years, from 600 hours to 1 140 hours per year (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Primary education provides for children aged 5-12 (ISCED 1) as the first part of what is commonly known as BGE (Broad General Education) under CfE. Starting at age five in Scotland, compulsory education

starts earlier than in most OECD countries, where students are required to start primary education at the age of six or seven. The seven years of primary education place Scotland's duration above OECD average, at the same length as in Australia, Denmark, Iceland and Norway (OECD, 2019^[9]). Students usually complete primary education by age 11 or 12 (Table 1.2).

Secondary schools offer up to six years of education, similarly to the OECD average (OECD, 2019^[9]). Lower-secondary education (ISCED 2) formally continues the BGE cycle with three years (S1 to S3). The following three years (S4 to S6) form the upper-secondary education cycle, known as the "Senior Phase" under CfE. Students typically prepare most of their qualifications during the Senior Phase, with S4 being the last year of compulsory education. Most learners continue studying beyond the compulsory age of 16 in upper-secondary education. In 2018/19, 11.9% of school leavers were in S4, 26.8% in S5, and 61.2% in S6 (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]). Under Curriculum for Excellence, upper-secondary levels aim to offer a variety of educational pathways and lead to a broad range of qualifications to diversify students' experience:

- General upper-secondary education covers three years at ISCED 3 for ages 15 to 18. It is offered in secondary schools and is the stage aimed at preparing young people for moving to further education, higher education (ISCED 6-8), training or into the workforce. Under CfE, schools can offer a wide variety of pathways to cater for learners' career aspirations through the Senior Phase, which include an increasing number of vocational opportunities within general education, including modern apprenticeships, for instance, or additional courses taken in colleges.
- Vocational educational pathways are also offered in colleges of further education (ISCED 3) with opportunities to continue on to professional studies and higher education (ISCED 5-8).

Table 1.2. Structure of education provision in Scotland (United Kingdom)

Age (years)	ISCED	Education level	Institutions
2/3-5	0	Early learning and childcare	
5-12	1	Primary: Seven years, P1 to P7 (compulsory)	Primary schools
12-15	2	Secondary: Three years, S1 to S3 (compulsory)	Secondary schools: comprehensive and mostly co-educational
15-18	3	Upper-secondary: Three years, S4 (compulsory) and S5-S6 (optional). Subjects studied at different levels for various qualifications including general and vocational	Secondary schools, colleges of further education or independent training providers
	4	Further education (non-advanced courses: vocational and general studies, etc.) Higher education (advanced courses: Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, etc.)	Colleges
17+	5	Higher education: Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, professional training courses and postgraduate	Higher education institutions (universities and colleges)

Sources: OECD (2020^[10]), "Diagram of the education system – United Kingdom", https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/GBR/GBR_2011_EN.pdf; European Commission (2020^[11]), "United Kingdom – Scotland Overview", https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/united-kingdom-scotland_en [accessed on 22 March 2021].

There is no school-leaving certificate in Scotland. Students in upper-secondary education may take a number of qualifications and courses, including Scottish National Qualifications or Awards certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scotland's awarding body. Learners can enrol and pass a range of qualification subjects from National 1 to National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher courses, Skills for Work and Baccalaureate qualifications, and more (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, 2021^[12]). These can be in areas such as English, Physics, Maths, Politics as well as in Technology, Creative Arts,

Drama, Environmental Sciences or Food and Health, for example. Scottish National Qualifications – including National 2-5, Higher and Advanced Higher – are single-subject qualifications that certify the achievement of a level of knowledge and skills in a range of subjects. They are referenced against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which unifies all qualifications in Scotland and classifies them between its 12 levels (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Scotland has worked to promote and develop its vocational education since 2014, including strengthening partnerships between schools, colleges and employers to cater more efficiently to learners' needs, linking with the economy's needs. Colleges offer vocationally oriented courses, with studies predominantly leading straight to employment within a specific industry. Regular qualification course levels include the Higher National Certificate (one year to complete) and Higher National Diploma (two years). Like the other qualifications, there is no specific age at which learners are supposed to take them. For students in the Senior Phase, schools work closely with colleges and often employers to increase the number of vocational opportunities available to learners and help them complete vocational courses alongside National Qualifications courses. Colleges also collaborate with local authorities and employers to deliver Modern Apprenticeships programmes for young people aged 16 or above who have left school and Foundation Apprenticeships for students still in full-time education. They also work in partnership with employers to prepare students for work and with universities to allow fast-track degree entry on some courses.

Scottish universities and colleges set their own entry requirements, often combining specific qualifications, subject, or grade, or a specific grade required in a subject relevant to the programmes applied for. Starting in 2020, courses at Scottish universities and colleges have two sets of requirements: standard and minimum. Minimum entry requirements apply for applicants who are considered to be “widening access” students, based on their merit, socio-economic background, school's category as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and other criteria (UCAS, 2020^[13]). Standard requirements can be stricter for competitive degrees, including requirements in terms of number of passes and minimum grades to obtain an SQA Highers and equivalent international qualifications.

Teachers and school leaders

In Scotland, all teachers need a graduate degree or equivalent, plus a teaching qualification to gain Qualified Teacher Status. Teaching qualifications include undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science; ISCED 6) and postgraduate qualifications (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education [PGDE]; ISCED 7). For all levels of education (pre-primary to upper-secondary), the minimum qualifications required for the Standard for Full Registration are a bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) and a postgraduate teaching qualification (ISCED 7) or a bachelor's degree in education (ISCED 6) (OECD, 2019^[14]). The Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) specifies what is expected of a student teacher at the end of initial teacher education seeking provisional registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). Having gained the SPR, all provisionally registered teachers continue their professional learning journey by moving towards attaining the Standard for Full Registration (SFR). The SFR is the gateway to the profession and is the benchmark of teacher competence for all teachers (OECD, 2019^[14]).

At lower-secondary level, teachers in Scotland spend 63% of their working time teaching, which is higher than the OECD average (43%). Scotland is among the only OECD education systems, along with countries such as Chile, Latvia and Spain, in which teachers spend at least 50% of their statutory working time teaching (OECD, 2019^[9]). Regulations state that teachers at all levels of education have a working week of 35 hours, and they are expected to be in school 1 045 hours per year (OECD, 2019^[14]). Five additional in-service days per year are reserved without class teaching. During their working time, teachers in most countries are required to perform various non-teaching tasks such as lesson planning/preparation, marking students' work and communicating or co-operating with parents or guardians.

Scotland is one of few OECD education systems in which teachers are required to teach the same number of hours across levels of education. It is more common in OECD countries and economies to see teaching time decrease as the level of education increases. Teaching time has evolved in Scotland between 2000 and 2019: it dropped by 95 hours at pre-primary and primary levels, as part of a teachers' agreement that introduced the 35-hour working week (*A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*, 2001), resulting in a maximum of 22.5 hours of teaching per week for primary, secondary and special education teachers. Even with this decrease in net contact time, the maximum time that teachers at these levels can be required to teach is still longer than the OECD average (OECD, 2019^[9]). Teachers are also expected to complete 35 hours of professional development per annum in Scotland. Professional development is excluded from statutory teaching time (OECD, 2019^[14]).

In Scotland, guidelines on school leaders' (known in Scotland as headteachers) working conditions do not detail their responsibilities and tasks. This is the case for about one-quarter of OECD countries with available information, including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. By comparison, regulations explicitly outline expectations for school leaders' managerial and leadership roles in more than half of the OECD and partner countries with available data (OECD, 2020^[8]). In 2018, the Scottish Government and local authorities agreed on a Headteachers' Charter, committing local authorities to support school leaders as the drivers of school improvement and devolving greater responsibility to them in decision making and resource use.

Attainment

Among students leaving school education in Scotland in 2018/19, 95% entered a positive destination, according to the Government's measures, the highest since 2009/10. Positive destinations include higher education, further education, employment, training, voluntary work and personal skills development, while other destinations include unemployed and seeking work, unemployed and not seeking work, and unknown. In general, after secondary education, learners mostly go on to higher education (40.3% in 2018/19), further education (27.3%) and into employment (22.9%). Out of the remaining 9.5%, half go to "other positive destinations" (4.5%) (Scottish Government, 2020^[15]).

In addition, in 2019, Scotland's Annual Participation Measure showed that 91.6% of 16-19 year-olds were participating, meaning they were in some form of education, employment or training and other personal development for most of the year. This ranged from 85.8% of young people in the most deprived areas to 96.3% in the least deprived areas. The gap (10.5 percentage points) has been narrowing over time as the proportion of young people from the most deprived areas who are participating has increased faster than has the proportion of young people from the least deprived areas (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).¹

School leaver attainment statistics in Scotland are based on the range and level of National Qualifications a student has accumulated by the time he or she leaves school. Reporting is based on Scotland's common qualifications framework, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). More than 60% of 2018/19 school leavers achieved one or more qualification passes at SCQF Level 6 or better (e.g. Higher); 85% had one or more passes at SCQF Level 5 or better (e.g. National 5); and 95.9% attained one or more passes at SCQF Level 4 or better (e.g. National 4).

These attainment statistics remained stable since 2014/15 and progressed since 2009/10 when 50.4% of school leavers achieved one or more passes at SCQF Level 6 or better; 77.1% had one or more passes at SCQF Level 5 or better; and 94.4% attained one or more passes at SCQF Level 4 or better. Attainment in terms of four and five passes at SCQF Level 6 also remained stable since 2014/15 and progressed since 2009/10.

The Scottish Government highlighted that recent changes to SCQF qualifications, including creating new vocationally oriented courses and changes to national courses, mean that comparison in attainment rates with years over a long period is complex and could be erroneous (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]). In 2020,

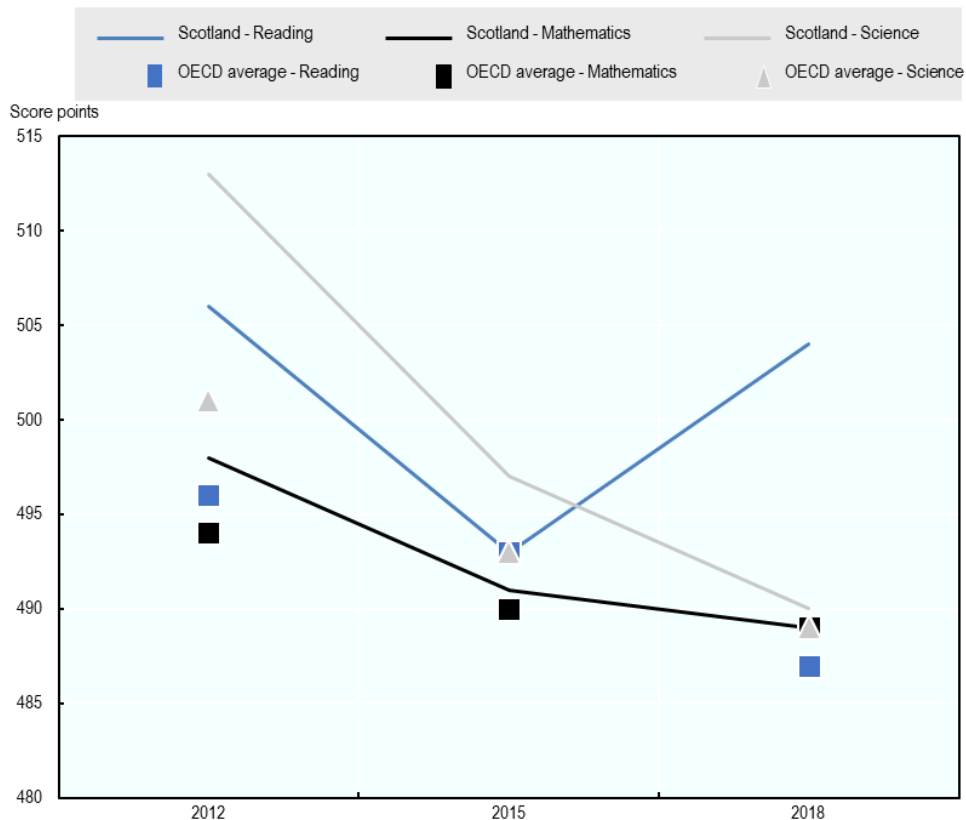
the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher exams and to the decision by the SQA not to collect nor mark coursework. Grades in these qualifications in 2020 were instead based on teacher estimates. The authors purposefully chose to analyse data from years before 2020 to control for the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on Scotland's education system.

Student performance

15-year-olds' levels in reading, mathematics and science

Scotland has ranked among higher-than-average country performers on international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), usually scoring at or above OECD average in mathematics, reading and science. Scotland's average scores declined between 2009 and 2018, similarly to average OECD performance, and improved in reading and remained stable in mathematics and science between 2015 and 2018 (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2. Average performance in reading, mathematics and science in Scotland (United Kingdom) and the OECD average, PISA 2012-18



Note: The data for this figure was collected before Costa Rica became an OECD member. In 2015 changes were made to the test design, administration, and scaling of PISA. These changes add statistical uncertainty to trend comparisons that should be taken into account when comparing 2015 results to those from prior years. Please see the Reader's Guide and Annex A5 of PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education (OECD, 2016) for a detailed discussion of these changes.

Sources: OECD (2019^[16]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>; OECD (2019^[17]), "Results for regions within countries", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/bad603f0-en>.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934240807>

In 2018, Scotland's average score on the PISA test in reading was 504 score points, representing an 11 score-point improvement on its 2015 score, almost on par with its 2012 performance, and higher performance than the OECD average. In mathematics, Scotland performed at OECD average with 489 score points, similar to its 2015 scores but lower than 2012. In science, Scotland scored at OECD average (490 score points), with similar scores to 2015 and declining since 2012 (OECD, 2019^[17]; OECD, 2019^[16]). Scotland's performance on PISA 2018 relative to OECD countries and economies improved in reading (only 5 OECD countries and economies outperformed Scotland, compared to 13 in 2015); it stayed similar in science (outperformed by 13 OECD countries and economies); and declined in mathematics (outperformed by 18 OECD countries and economies, compared to 14 in 2015) (Scottish Government, 2019^[18]; Scottish Government, 2016^[19]).

In 2018, Scotland's proportion of top performers in reading (10.3%) was higher than in 2015 and higher than the OECD average (8.7%), while the proportion of low performers (15.5%) was similar to 2015 and smaller than the OECD average (22.6%). Scotland's proportions of top performers were slightly higher than the OECD average in science and close to average in mathematics (slightly over 10%), both similar to the respective proportions in 2015. The proportions of low performers were close to OECD averages in mathematics (23.5%) and science (21.1%), and also similar to the respective proportions in 2015 (OECD, 2019^[16]).

Students' progress in the system is assessed as part of ongoing learning and teaching, both periodically and at key transitions, with the first formal assessment for qualifications, including examinations taken around the age of 15 and at the end of the Senior Phase. BGE has five levels of progression (early, first, second, third and fourth) that approximately correspond to system levels of pre-school to lower-secondary education. Achievement of a level is based on teachers' overall professional judgement and informed by a range of evidence, against the benchmarks defined for each curriculum level. The Senior Phase represents the sixth level of progression in CfE. Based on the annual assessment of achievement of CfE levels, 72% of P1, P4 and P7 learners (combined) achieved expected levels in literacy and 79% in numeracy. In secondary education, 88% of S3 learners achieved the expected level in literacy and 90% in numeracy (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

15-year-olds' levels in global competences

PISA's new global competence module aims to capture the capacity of 15-year-olds to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.

Scotland ranked among the top-performing countries in global competence. It scored higher (with a mean score of 534) than its expected outcomes based on its average results in reading, mathematics and science. Scotland was the fourth top-performing country, behind Singapore, Canada, and Hong Kong (China), with mean performance scores more than 50 points above the overall average (of 474 points). While differences in average performance across countries and economies were large, the gap between the highest performing and lowest performing students within each country was even larger. Scotland was among the countries and economies whose variations in performance scores between students were the largest, along with Canada, Israel, Malta, and Singapore, exceeding 100 score points, compared to an average of 91 points (OECD, 2020^[20]).

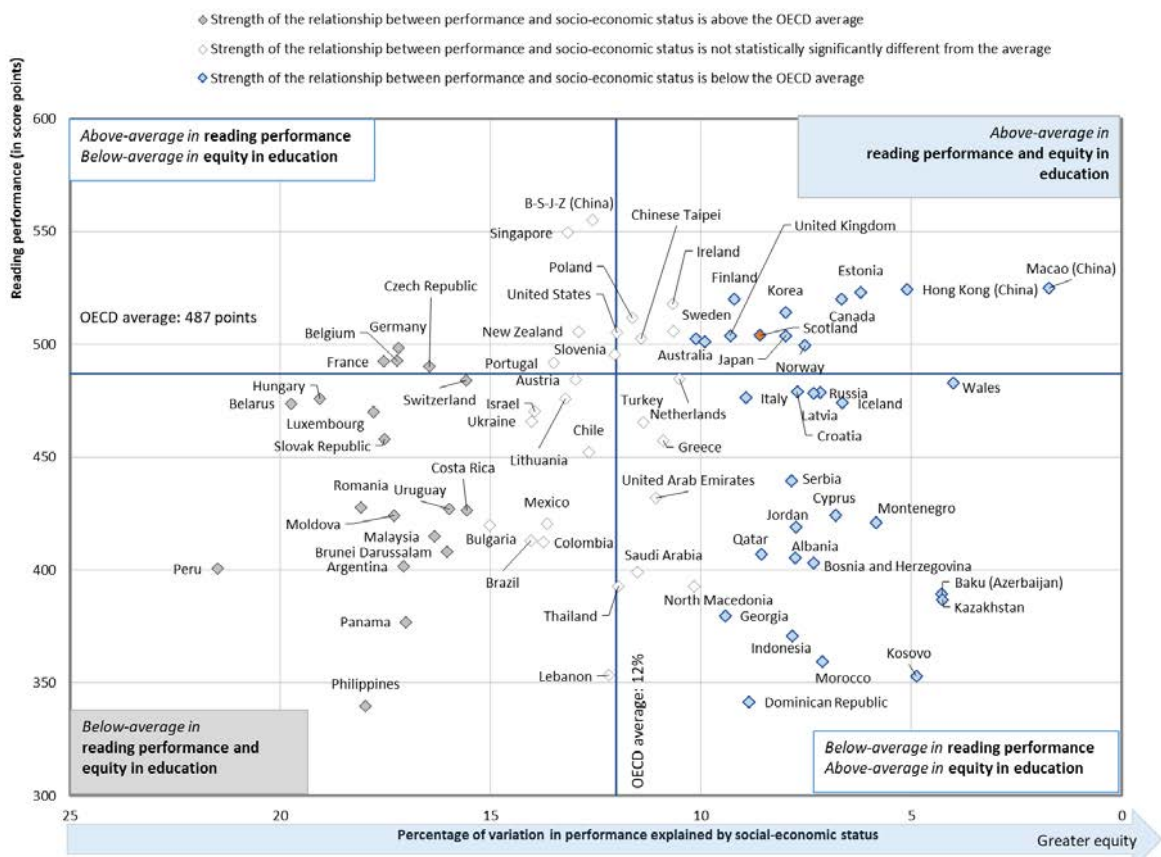
Scotland was the third country with the largest proportion of students who scored at Level 5 (12%), behind Singapore (22%) and Canada (15%). This is significantly higher than the average of 4% of students. At Level 5, the highest level of proficiency in global competence, students can analyse and understand multiple perspectives. They can examine and evaluate large amounts of information without much support provided in the unit's scenario. Students can effectively explain situations that require complex thinking and extrapolation and can build models of the situation described in the stimulus (OECD, 2020^[20]).

Equity

Students' socio-economic status has a relatively small impact on their performance in Scotland, compared to other OECD countries and economies. The extent of socio-economic disparities in academic performance indicates whether an education system helps promote equality of opportunities. Figure 1.3 shows that in Scotland, students' socio-economic status had relatively little impact on their reading performance than other OECD countries. In 2018, the socio-economic status as measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) explained only 8.6% of the difference in performance between students from the most and least advantaged backgrounds in Scotland. This means students' socio-economic status had a smaller impact on their performance in Scotland than on average across the OECD, where the ESCS explained 12% of the difference in performance. The impact of students' socio-economic status on their PISA performance in maths and science was also smaller in Scotland than on average in the OECD area, explaining 7.9% of the performance difference in maths, compared to 13.8% on average, and 10.1% of the performance difference in science compared to 12.8% on average (OECD, 2019^[21]; OECD, 2020^[22]).

Figure 1.3. Equity and reading performance, PISA 2018

Equity measured by the strength of the socio-economic gradient



Note: The data for this figure was collected before Costa Rica became an OECD member. B-S-J-Z (China) stands for Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (China).

Source: OECD (2019^[16]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>; OECD (2019^[17]), "Results for regions within countries", <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/bad603f0-en>.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934240826>

In 2018, the proportion of disadvantaged students who were academically resilient was higher in Scotland (13.9%) than on average across OECD countries and economies (11.3%). This marks the overall progress made on academic resilience since 2012, both in Scotland and on average. The difference in performance is significant (32 score points) between students at the top and bottom quarters of socio-economic status in Scotland, although still below the OECD average (37 score points) (OECD, 2019^[21]).

PISA 2018 data suggest that the variation around Scotland's mean reading score is largely explained by factors other than school characteristics. The average score-point variation in reading performance is largely due to within-school variation (84.8%, above the OECD average of 71%). Only a very small percentage is explained by between-school variations (8.1%, compared to 29% on average) (OECD, 2019^[21]).

On PISA's global competence module, the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students' scores in global competence was larger than 80 score points in Scotland but was not significant after taking into account students' performance in reading, mathematics and science. The findings show that advantaged students (those in the top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) have access to more learning opportunities than disadvantaged students in Scotland, as is the case in 31 of 64 participating countries and economies.

At the system level, Scotland uses three indicators to measure the attainment gap between the proportion of school students from the most and least deprived areas of Scotland:

- At SCQF Level 4 or better, 98.8% of students from the least deprived areas attained one pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 92.1% among those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 6.7 percentage points, up from 6.1 percentage points in 2017/18 and down from 11.3 percentage points in 2009/10 (the first year for which comparable statistics are available).
- At SCQF Level 5 or better, 94.6% of students from the least deprived areas attained one pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 74.4% among those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 20.2 percentage points, down very slightly from 20.3 percentage points in 2017/18, with attainment having decreased among students from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The attainment gap in 2009/10 was 33.3 percentage points.
- At SCQF Level 6 or better, 79.3% of students from the least deprived areas attained one pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 43.5% among those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 35.8 percentage points, down from 37.4 percentage points in 2017/18, with attainment having decreased among students from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The attainment gap in 2009/10 was 45.6 percentage points.

Interestingly, learners in Scotland living in accessible rural areas are the most likely overall to achieve SCQF Level 6 or better (62.8%), while learners in remote rural areas are the most likely to achieve at SCQF Level 5 or better (87.9%) in 2018/19, compared with other areas. The least likely to achieve those levels are learners in remote small towns and urban areas classified as "other than large" (Scottish Government, 2020^[15]).

School environment, health and well-being

Improving children and young people's health and well-being is one of the Scottish Government's key priorities. Students report more often being exposed to bullying in Scotland than on average across OECD countries and economies (index of 0.23 for a basis 0 on average). A larger share of students are bullied frequently (11.4% compared to 7.8%). The disciplinary climate in regular classes is similar in Scotland to the average climate across OECD countries and economies (index of 0.07). The large majority of students declare that situations that are uncondusive to learning occur "never or hardly ever" or "in some lessons"

only, including when students do not listen, when there is noise, or when students or teachers need to wait before class starts (OECD, 2019^[23]; OECD, 2020^[24]).

Competition between students seems to be slightly more common in Scotland than co-operation. In 2018, some 73% of students reported that it seemed “very” or “extremely true” to them that students were competing against each other, whereas only 61% said they observed co-operation among students. Students in Scotland also reported that their schoolmates seemed to value competition more than co-operation (OECD, 2020^[24]). This was in opposition with the attitude across OECD countries and economies, where competition between students was on average less observed (50%) than co-operation (62%) (OECD, 2019^[23]).

Students in Scotland report slightly lower life satisfaction than the OECD average and more prevalent fear of failure than average. The sense of belonging to one’s school is slightly less strong in Scotland than on average across OECD countries and economies (OECD, 2020^[24]). On a final note, students in Scotland display a growth mindset more often than on average across OECD countries and economies (OECD, 2019^[23]).

Governance and funding

Scotland has a long tradition of organising its own education system and wields full legislative power and executive authority in all areas of education since the Scotland Act of 1998. In the current government, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is also the Deputy First Minister and has overall responsibility for Scottish education, in collaboration with supporting ministers sharing responsibilities in specific areas, and with support from relevant administrations, including the Learning Directorate. The Scottish Government, via the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, sets broad policy for all aspects of education in Scotland. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the framework for curriculum policy set at the central level, upon which schools and practitioners build their own curriculum, adapted to the needs of their learners and their local context.

The Learning Directorate works with statutory agencies to implement policies, including Education Scotland (responsible for educational improvement and inspection), the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (funding teaching and research in higher and further education). Since it was established in 2011, Education Scotland inherited the full range of functions to support educational quality and improvement, including the inspection and review functions formerly held by the independent Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Education Scotland’s Chief Executive Officer also fulfils the responsibilities of Chief Inspector of Education with a view to linking quality assurance with educational improvement support. A dedicated strategic director has specific responsibility for inspection standards.

Her Majesty’s (HM) Inspectors of Education perform inspections and reviews all sectors of Scottish education to provide quality assurance of learning and educational standards, gather evidence to inform HMIE advice to ministers, and build capacity through the system by collaborating and sharing practices with practitioners. Schools perform self-evaluations based on Education Scotland’s guidance, with support from their local authority, which inform external school inspections performed on a sample of about 240 schools every year. Individual inspection reports and summaries of inspection findings are published on Education Scotland’s website along with recommendations for support, if needed, by the school’s local authority.

Responsibility for organising, operating and staffing the school system within the Scottish Government’s policy guidelines is decentralised. The 32 local authorities, run by councils elected every four years, deliver a wide array of services, including schools, housing and social work, and are committed to pursuing national educational objectives. The local authorities have direct responsibility for schools, hiring school staff, providing and financing most educational services and implementing Scottish Government policies

in education. Local authorities help schools design and implement their curriculum based on the CfE framework.

In 2017, Scotland introduced a new layer of educational governance by establishing six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) across the country to bring local authorities together alongside the central administration, and collaborate more effectively for greater equity and quality in education. Each RIC provides an annual regional plan and work programme aligned to the National Improvement Framework (NIF). They are led by a regional improvement lead, appointed by a joint steering group made up of officials from both the Scottish Government and local authorities. The regional improvement lead is to be formally managed by the chief executive of the employing local authority while reporting to all collaborating local authorities and the HM Chief Inspector and Chief Executive of Education Scotland. This followed an OECD recommendation made in 2015 to “strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the ‘middle’”. The recommendation invited Scotland to shift the system’s centre of gravity towards schools and their local communities, including by fostering mutual support and learning across local authorities and networks of schools, and giving them a more prominent role as part of a “reinforced middle” (OECD, 2015^[4]).

Local authorities fund schools via local funding, except for specific funding of national programmes such as the pupil equity funding. Since 2007, education funding has been rolled into the local government settlement, leaving local authorities to prioritise funding and allocate budgets. The Scottish Government provides 70% of all local government revenue, while the remaining 30% are business rates and council tax levied on residents. In terms of gross revenue expenditure across pre-school, primary, secondary, special school and non-school funding in 2018/19, GBP 5.5 billion was spent in total on all education levels in Scotland, an increase of 4.9% in real terms since 2013/14. The Scottish Government allocates specific resources, including for CfE-related spending (GBP 12.3 million in 2019/20). Local authorities devolve the management of some expenditures to the school level, leaving school leaders to make decisions about the use of at least 80% of school-based funding. Devolved School Management Guidelines were revised in 2012 to empower school leaders to meet local needs and deliver the best possible outcomes for young learners, in line with several Scottish policy objectives of CfE, Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Schools are responsible for the quality of education they offer to their students and are accountable to their local authority, including publishing annual improvement plans based on objectives set with their local authority. Schools’ responsibility to ensure the quality of education and their ability to design their own curricula to meet learners’ needs increased with the implementation of education policies such as CfE and the Empowerment Agenda in Scotland. Based on the national CfE framework, individual schools develop their own “curriculum rationale”, which forms the basis of a school’s approach to addressing learning needs. Rationales are expected to be developed with staff, parents, carers, local partners and youth in the school community.

Education policies

Curriculum for Excellence

Curriculum for Excellence, introduced for its first phase of implementation in schools in 2010, caters for children aged 3 to 18 years, with what is commonly known in Scotland as Broad General Education (early learning, primary and lower-secondary levels) followed by the Senior Phase (three years of upper-secondary education). The philosophy of CfE is that of a future-oriented education, aiming to help students develop into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (referred to as the “four capacities”).

CfE defines curriculum as all the learning planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. Learning aims to be holistic and centred on the learner, and students are expected to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes inherent to the four capacities. The CfE framework encompasses four contexts for learning: eight curriculum areas, interdisciplinary learning, ethos and life of the school, and opportunities for personal achievements. CfE enables school communities to design their curriculum, and teachers are encouraged to teach in the way they esteem best suited to their students' needs. The conception of teacher as curriculum developer was relatively new when first implemented in Scottish schools. Schools and local authorities were encouraged from the beginning to innovate and find local approaches to planning and delivering the curriculum within the framework provided centrally.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence was a ground-breaking curriculum policy when it first took shape in the early 2000s. In 2000, the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 set the principles that education should be directed to the development of children's and young persons' personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, and that youth's views should be taken into account in decisions that significantly affect them. A national debate (2002) concluded that one educational priority was to align curriculum to these aspirations, and the first statement of intent for a new Curriculum for Excellence was subsequently published in 2004.

CfE was further shaped over several years: a *Building the Curriculum* series developed the parameters of CfE in collaboration with national and local partners until 2010. Changes to the national regime of qualifications and discussions around student assessment later aimed to align assessment and examination approaches with CfE, along with a number of additional policies developed subsequently. Scotland spent almost a decade preparing its implementation by schools in 2010, when it was mainstreamed across the country.

In 2015, an OECD review of Scotland's Broad General Education concluded that CfE was a "watershed" moment for education in Scotland, widely supported and exemplified in some schools' inspiring curriculum experience, but that it required ongoing efforts to turn it into a reality for all students in the system. At the time, the OECD review acknowledged that the foundations of CfE had been set, including curriculum building blocks, assessments and qualifications, and adjustments to teacher education, leadership and the support structure. The consensus around CfE was deeply rooted, and the teaching profession was progressively taking ownership. Challenges remained, however, including a lack of clarity in the nature of CfE (was it a curriculum or a reform package?) and a risk of adopting a "wait and see" approach that would hinder CfE and its development in schools. The review proposed a number of detailed recommendations. Those directly linked to CfE are summarised here (the detail can be found in the full report) (OECD, 2015^[4]):

- To ensure equity and quality, develop metrics that do justice to the full range of CfE capacities informing a bold understanding of quality and equity.
- To strengthen decision making and governance, 1) create a new narrative for Curriculum for Excellence; 2) strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the "middle"; and 3) simplify and clarify core guidance, including in the definitions of what constitutes Curriculum for Excellence.
- To enhance schooling, teaching and leadership, focus on the quality of implementation of CfE in schools and communities and make this an evaluation priority.
- To improve assessment and evaluation, strike a more even balance between the formative focus of assessment and developing a robust evidence base on learning outcomes and progression.

The Scottish Government received these recommendations and used them as input into further policy development of CfE. The main actions taken as a result are summarised below and are analysed to a larger extent in Chapters 2-5 of this report:

- The guidance framework for the BGE curriculum was updated (including the development of CfE Benchmarks and publication of a Statement for Practitioners in 2016), and a "refreshed curriculum

narrative” was published in 2019 as a response to the call for a new CfE narrative and simplified guidance.

- National oversight and management arrangements for the curriculum framework were adjusted in 2018/19 in an attempt for more collaborative and systemic implementation.
- The quality and equity of CfE implementation in schools were made the focus of sampled inspection, and a number of tools, action plans and strategies were developed to enhance CfE implementation and to increase engagement in secondary schools.
- The Scottish Attainment Challenge was developed in 2015, and the National Improvement Framework in 2016 to promote and monitor equity and quality across the education system.

Additional policy developments that go beyond the scope of CfE, but affect its environment, are reviewed in the following sections. This new OECD review provides the opportunity for an external assessment of progress in terms of its implementation in both BGE and the Senior Phase, in light of current experience and international evidence to adapt and update it for the future.

Main education policies and priorities around Curriculum for Excellence

Getting it right for every child

Getting it right for every child was introduced in 2006. It provides a framework for all professionals working with children and youth to enforce children’s rights and guarantee children’s well-being holistically and across services. The Scottish Government decided in 2019 that the best way to promote and embed GIRFEC further was in partnership with local delivery partners, through practical help, guidance and support, and not on a statutory basis. The Scottish Government is therefore refreshing GIRFEC policy with those partners and developing new practice guidance on the key components of GIRFEC. Along with CfE and Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy (DYW), GIRFEC is a pillar of Scotland’s commitment to inclusive education. GIRFEC policy has been undergoing revisions since 2019 (new guidance) to allow for more partnership work between local delivery partners and the Scottish Government.

Early childhood care and education

Realising the Ambition: Being Me was published in February 2020 as an update to national practice guidance for the ECEC sector (*Building the Ambition*, 2014 and *Pre-birth to Three*, 2010). The policy reflects CfE curriculum guidance for ECEC based on national and international research in early childhood. It provides pedagogy and practice guidance for practitioners working with young children, also in alignment with other policies (e.g. GIRFEC) (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Scottish Attainment Challenge

As part of the SNP’s programme for government in 2016, the First Minister set her government the mission “to close the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities.” The Scottish Attainment Challenge was developed to this end in 2015, with GBP 750 million over five years to support schools and local authorities in improving literacy, numeracy and health and well-being in a way that would “close the gap”. Following implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the Scottish Government provided some evidence of impact from several performance and evaluation reports published in 2019 (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]):

- The gaps between school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas achieving one pass or more at SCQF Levels 3 or better, 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better have reduced between 2009/10 and 2017/18.

- Attainment among the most disadvantaged children and young people rose in numeracy at all stages and in reading and writing at P1, P4 and P7. The attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged has narrowed on most indicators.
- Some 88% of headteachers reported improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap due to interventions supported by the Attainment Scotland Fund, and 95% expect to see improvements over the next five years.

Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy

In 2014, *Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy* set out to reduce youth unemployment levels by 40% by 2021. The strategy aims to create a work-relevant, school-based curriculum offer for young people in Scotland, informed by the needs of current and anticipated job markets. This includes embedding career education for children aged 3 to 18 years, offering formal careers advice at an earlier point in school, embedding employer engagement in education, creating new work-based learning offers and widening learner pathway options for young people in their Senior Phase. New learner pathway options include a wider apprenticeship offer for young people with Foundation Apprenticeships (SCQF Level 6) and Graduate Level Apprenticeships in place and Levels 4 and 5 in development. Implementation of DYW required schools to include the strategy as part of their curriculum development, thus creating direct links with CfE (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Teacher policies

A review of teacher education published in 2010 (Donaldson, 2010^[25]) concluded that the two most important and achievable ways in which school education can realise the high aspirations Scotland has for its young people are supporting and strengthening the quality of teaching and leadership. The publication, *Teaching Scotland's Future*, highlighted the importance of sustained teacher professional learning and development in improving outcomes for young people. It also emphasised the importance of career pathways in supporting teacher recruitment and retention. The review led to wider recognition of the importance of quality professional learning and good educational leadership while providing a basis for professional update. It also reinforced the place of masters studies for teachers, increasingly common at all levels of the profession. A wide range of new forms of initial teacher education programmes also appeared in Scotland towards the end of the decade, aimed at helping to address recruitment challenges for teachers in priority subjects and the remote and rural areas of Scotland. Work to develop teacher career pathway models was conducted from 2017 to 2020. It was delayed by the COVID-19 crisis and implementation originally scheduled for August 2021 might also be delayed (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

Leadership

The Scottish Government has prioritised developing teacher and school leadership in recent years, including developing a broader offer of professional learning and the new requirement for school leaders to hold the Standard for Headship, a new qualification. The mission to clarify and bring coherence to educational leadership in Scotland, previously held by the Scottish College for Education Leadership, was transferred to Education Scotland and its Professional Learning and Leadership Directorate in 2018. Education Scotland started an evaluation process to inform developments of the professional learning offer and committed to collaborating with Regional Improvement Collaboratives, local authorities and the Learning Directorate in this endeavour (Scottish Government, 2021^[5]).

New national courses and revised national qualifications

The Scottish Qualifications Authority, in collaboration with stakeholders, designed new national qualifications in the attempt to align them with CfE and to support learners' achievement in developing the four capacities and the skills for learning, life and work that underpin them. The new national courses and

qualifications aim to provide high standards and a formal acknowledgement of learners' achievements while ensuring at the same time continuity with the breadth and depth of learning sought at earlier levels of CfE. The new national courses were first introduced in 2013/14, then revised and implemented as the revised national qualifications between 2016 and 2019, following concerns that the new structure and practice of national courses resulted in an overload of assessment (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2021^[26]; Scottish Government, 2021^[5]). The number of qualifications registered in the SCQF beyond those awarded by the SQA also grew due to the Scottish Government's promotion of the diversification of possible pathways and qualifications for learners.

SQA qualifications at SCQF Level 5 include the National 5 Award, Skills for Work National 5, the National Certificate and the National Progression Award. Level 6 qualifications include the SQA's national courses at Higher level, as well as Skills for Work Higher and other Awards and Certificates. At SCQF Level 7, SQA qualifications include Advanced Higher, the Scottish Baccalaureate, as well as Awards, Higher National and Advanced Certificates.

In broad terms, Higher qualifications are considered the Scottish equivalent to English A-Levels, but they are not identical. Some notable differences are that Scottish Highers are one-year courses, whereas A-Levels take two years to complete; students in Scotland get a smaller range of subjects to choose from at Higher and Advanced Higher levels than in England for A-Levels; and students tend to take more Highers in Scotland than A-Levels in England if they plan to apply for higher education, and they have the option of taking Advanced Highers. The number of University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points awarded by each grade also differ between the two types of qualifications, the A-Levels' grades A* and A corresponding to Scottish Advanced Higher Grades A and B, respectively (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. Number of UCAS points awarded by qualifications, Scotland and England (United Kingdom)

	Scottish Higher	Scottish Advanced Higher	English A-Levels
Grade A*	Not applicable	Not applicable	56 points
Grade A	33 points	56 points	48 points
Grade B	27 points	48 points	40 points
Grade C	21 points	40 points	32 points
Grade D	15 points	32 points	24 points

Source: UCAS (2021^[27]), "Calculate your UCAS tariff points", <https://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator> [accessed on 27 April 2021].

The National Improvement Framework

The National Improvement Framework was developed in 2016 with the ambition to "make Scotland 'the best place to grow up and learn'" and to complement the existing pillars of the Scottish education system: CfE, GIRFEC and DYW. The NIF aims to structure a system and collaborative approach to educational improvement to pursue two key targets: achieving excellence through raising attainment and achieving equity by ensuring that all children have the same opportunity to succeed. The NIF sets out a holistic view of the education system, bringing together evidence and information from all levels and on all aspects that impact performance.

A new national data collection system provides additional information at the school, local and national level about children's progress in literacy and numeracy, based on teachers' assessment of progress. To support teachers in making judgements, the Scottish Government has introduced benchmarks for greater clarity on national standards as well as expanding opportunities for professional dialogue around standards through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

In 2019, local authorities reported that teachers feel increasingly confident when assessing progress. From 2018, Scottish National Standardised Assessments provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence. These assessments occur in primary school (ages 5, 8 and 11) and lower-secondary (age 14). Since 2016, attainment in the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels has been published annually to provide key data regarding children’s literacy and numeracy progress (OECD, 2019^[28]).

Tensions around Curriculum for Excellence that impact student learning

This OECD assessment aims primarily to understand how CfE is implemented in BGE and the Senior Phase and to what extent it contributes to an education of quality for all young people in Scotland. As the scope of the assessment was agreed upon, a number of issues cutting across the Scottish education system were raised by the Scottish Parliament and Government, as well as by the OECD team. These issues arise from the need to find a balance between many parameters in Scotland’s complex education system and have implications for how CfE is implemented in the current policy context. The issues are reviewed below as part of the broader context and provide a useful backdrop for the analysis presented in the following chapters:

- **Tensions found between local curriculum flexibility and the need for coherence to achieve system-wide objectives:** By design, CfE enshrines the principle of local curriculum flexibility since it gives schools the autonomy to design their own curriculum to best respond to students’ needs. CfE committed to school empowerment in a system already characterised by strong policy leadership from the centre and assertive local governments. At the same time, concerns arise in the public debate about whether the variability that inevitably characterises schools’ curricula effectively provides an excellent education for all learners or if it might increase educational inequalities. This also touches upon the issue of what level and kind of support schools might need to design curricula of high quality while respecting teachers’ and school leaders’ working time.
- **Tensions in the understandings of breadth and depth of learning:** Opposed in the public debate, breadth and depth of learning seem not to have the same definition for the various stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team tended to reflect this tension in the opposition between Broad General Education and Senior Phase, but the lack of clarity around the concepts poses many questions. For instance: does breadth refer to the number of subjects taken by students, and depth to the time allocated to each; or do they both refer to specific pedagogical approaches; are they exclusive or can they be complementary, and many more.
- **Tensions in the conceptualisation of knowledge, skills and competencies:** Although CfE was developed to promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes, the public debate as observed by the OECD team in Scotland throughout discussions tends to oppose knowledge and skills. Some also observed that while BGE was focused on the combination, the Senior Phase may still be focused on disciplinary knowledge (defined as subject-specific concepts and detailed content (OECD, 2019^[29])). The OECD’s Future of Education and Skills 2030 project describes the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (integrations referred to as “competencies”) that enables students to perform in ill-defined environments, thus allowing them to navigate a fast-paced and uncertain world. The definition of competencies as integrative and with a broad performance orientation allows the debate to shift away from the traditional “knowledge versus skills” focus by acknowledging the importance of both in learning.
- **Tensions between curriculum, student assessment and evaluation:** There is an apparent (mis)alignment between curriculum, assessment and evaluation policies, especially at the Senior Phase. This tension was raised throughout the meetings of the OECD team in Scotland as one of the key issues that needs to be reviewed for CfE to perform at its best. These policies have complex

relationships across numerous education systems, requiring alignment in their design as well as their implementation (OECD, 2013^[30]; Gouédard et al., 2020^[2]; OECD, 2020^[31]).

Some of these tensions likely arose throughout the development and the ten years of implementing CfE due to a combination of the ambition of the policy and the principle of flexibility embedded in CfE. Yet, some of these are inherent in the design of CfE itself, as it allows for flexibility in the interpretation of the principles and actions to make CfE happen on the ground across Scotland.

These tensions may affect the learning experiences of students across the country. They may vary in terms of the curriculum, as teachers have great freedom and may be overloaded in terms of course choices in some places with much less offer in other regions. When learners move up to Senior Phase, they have different types of assessments in relation to the type of learning they are experiencing in Broad General Education. Finally, students may have challenges finding the right balance in developing their knowledge and broader competencies. To resolve these tensions, it is necessary for Scotland to pinpoint where it wants to be on each of these, for CfE to reach its full potential and allow Scottish education to offer an education of excellence to all its learners.

Conclusion

The variable progress made in different education outcomes indicators, ten years of experience with CfE in schools, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the society, economy and education provide a good opportunity to review how CfE was implemented and what can be done for it to continue to deliver quality learning for all students across Scotland. Education system performance in Scotland presents a variable picture: while PISA results had declined between 2009 and 2015 (following the OECD average), they improved in reading and remained stable in mathematics and science between 2015 and 2018. At the same time, Scottish students have been among the top performers in global competences, which measure their capacity to interpret worldviews, to engage effectively in interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. In addition, there has been an increase to 95% in the positive destinations of those leaving schools in 2019 (considered in Scotland in relation to higher and further education, employment and other positive destinations).

In terms of equity, there has been an apparent improvement for disadvantaged students. According to PISA, the impact of students' socio-economic status on their performance in reading, maths and science is among the lowest across OECD countries. At the same time, there is a higher proportion of resilient students (students from disadvantaged backgrounds who perform at high levels). Scottish data show an improvement in the performance of disadvantaged students in SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6, with lower performance for those living in small towns in relation to rural areas.

Student well-being at age 15 shows a mixed picture, with higher levels than OECD average in bullying, in competition and in anxiety, and lower student well-being. At the same time, students report they experience a higher-than-average growth mindset. It is important to note that students at age 16 take their national exams, which are high stakes in terms of their next educational steps.

To achieve these outcomes, the system is organised around a mostly public provision of education for 3 to 18 year-olds. Education beyond lower-secondary levels offers a range of choice for students, both in schools, colleges of further education and other educational settings, which can be combined. Teachers appear high quality in terms of requirements for entry into the profession and availability of support and professional development. School leaders have new supports in place to exercise their roles.

Students are engaged in learning through Curriculum for Excellence, which was introduced in schools from 2010. CfE aims to provide a holistic approach to learning, to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. To support CfE and the education system, the Scottish Government has introduced a range of policies and strategies for schools, for education professionals, and to drive system performance to higher levels.

After ten years since its first implementation across schools, a range of issues and tensions have become apparent, highlighted by the Scottish Parliament and Government and other education stakeholders. Indeed, policies need constant revision and adjustment, and this ten-year timeline is an opportunity to review CfE and its implementation from a student perspective: how students progress through the system, especially in the transition from lower-secondary into Senior Phase with CfE.

The ambitions of CfE are to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. With ten years of practice with CfE in schools, how do students live CfE and their learning as they progress through the system? The analysis undertaken in this report reflects on how CfE has and can deliver the best possible learning experience to prepare students for their future by looking at CfE and its change approach. To respond, the following chapters reflect on:

- How has CfE been implemented from a student perspective? Is the CfE design working well for all students as they progress and transition through the system?
- How have those shaping CfE been involved, and how can they engage most productively to continue delivering the best possible CfE?
- How has the policy environment contributed to CfE reaching all schools consistently?
- Has there been a clear and well-structured implementation strategy for CfE from its inception?

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Note

1. The authors purposefully chose to analyse statistics and other quantitative data from years prior to 2020, to control for the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on Scotland's education system, since the focus of this report is on trends and processes that predate the pandemic. Unless the phenomenon analysed is directly linked to the crisis, the latest school year of reference used for statistics is thus 2018/19.

2 The design and implementation of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

This chapter analyses the design of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and how it has been implemented since its inception in 2000. It analyses the progress made and potential gaps between the original intent and actual practice. The chapter starts with a description of CfE, follows with a review of its vision, its policy development in relation to student learning and progression from primary through to secondary education and Senior Phase, and its assessment. It examines the resources invested and concludes with a summary of issues for consideration.

Introduction

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), a remarkable curriculum initiative that was set in motion in the early 2000s, remains an inspiring curriculum policy in theory and practice in schools today. Its vision offers the rationale for rethinking curriculum intentions and shifting emphasis in teaching and learning towards a more holistic approach that encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes and values held by society.

Since its inception in 2000, CfE has made progress. Primary schools had the opportunity to pilot CfE approaches before all schools started rolling it out in 2010/11 (Kidner, 2013^[1]), followed by secondary schools. Between 2014 and 2016, students were awarded revised Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) national qualifications for the first time. The first student cohorts who studied following the CfE framework from start to finish (aged 3 to 18 years) recently completed compulsory education.

Two decades since its inception presents a fair amount of time and evidence for reflection on progress made from policy to actual practice. It is challenging to know, however, whether CfE's implementation has resulted in all students accomplishing its objectives since its realisation from 2010 onwards. The difficulty comes first from the nature of policy implementation itself: a policy design rarely translates into faithful enactment, as those involved in practice interpret and enact the policy differently (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[2]). This challenge is all the more frequent with policies, such as CfE, whose principles encourage design flexibility at the school level. Such flexibility allows for perhaps different variations than originally planned in the policy. In addition, the metrics to understand its accomplishments remain elusive. Understanding progress made requires an analysis of the curriculum as well as the process followed for its implementation.

"Curriculum" is an elusive concept, with dozens of interpretations in literature (Jackson, 1992^[3]). Essentially, curriculum can be seen as a "plan or design for learning", with many possible representations and at many levels of education (van den Akker, 2003^[4]). The analysis, here, of the interplay between the intended and implemented curriculum will focus on the perceptions and experiences of the learners (as the ultimate audience of the curriculum), with connections to the roles of teachers as main curriculum actors.

From a policy perspective, curriculum development is a highly dynamic enterprise, driven by numerous ideological considerations, interests and expectations – of many groups (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[2]; Gouëdard et al., 2020^[5]). Consequently, many actors and factors influence the processes and results of curriculum change, which can be observed in school organisations, classroom realities and student experiences and outcomes (Fullan, 2008^[6]; Levin, 2008^[7]). Many such dynamic forces are addressed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this report. This chapter analyses how elements of policy design have played out in the implementation of CfE and what can be done in the future to enhance these.

The findings are structured along three levers of the OECD Framework on Education Policy Implementation (as introduced in Chapter 1 and Figure 1.1): the policy is driven by a vision, offers coherent policy actions, and is adequately resourced to be implemented in a sustainable manner. The curriculum spider web (Thijs and van den Akker, 2009^[8]) is further used to analyse the various components of CfE and their coherence.

An overview of Curriculum for Excellence and its components

Curriculum for Excellence caters for children aged 3 to 18 years in Scotland (United Kingdom). Early learning, primary and lower-secondary levels are grouped under Broad General Education (BGE), while the Senior Phase covers the three years of upper-secondary education. Following much work on its development, it was implemented across primary schools in Scotland from 2010 onwards, then in secondary schools. The Senior Phase was phased in from 2013/14 to 2015/16 (Scottish Parliament -

Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]). As an overarching description of CfE and its development is provided in Chapter 1, this section describes the different components that currently shape CfE for schools and teachers.

The vision for Curriculum for Excellence was formulated in 2004 around the “four capacities” that represent the essential purposes of Scottish education (Figure 2.1). Scotland further specified attributes and capabilities, which students can cultivate throughout their education, in order to develop the four capacities (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1. The four capacities of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence



Source: Scottish Government (2019^[10]) “Refreshed Curriculum for Excellence narrative”, <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/> [accessed on 18 January 2021].

In September 2019, following the 2015 OECD review recommendation to “create a new narrative for CfE”, a refreshed narrative for Scotland’s curriculum positioned CfE in the current context, explaining that Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence helps children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for life in the 21st century. The four capacities remain at its centre, enabling all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. These capacities are seen as:

- reflecting and recognising the lifelong nature of education and learning
- recognising the need for all children and young people to know themselves as individuals and to develop their relationships with others, in families and in communities
- recognising the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children and young people need to acquire to thrive in our inter-connected, digital and rapidly changing world
- enabling children and young people to be democratic citizens and active shapers of that world.

Besides aiming for “excellence”, the word “**all**” (children and young persons) in the vision underlines that CfE also explicitly aims at equity. This dual focus is aligned with international best practice, but, as discussed later, not without challenges.

Curriculum is a wide concept in terms of the definition used in CfE. It is the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. CfE covers the entire schooling route from age 3 to 18 years and ultimately aims at “positive and sustained destinations” (in higher and vocational education, in the world of work and in personal life) following the schooling years.

CfE puts the learner explicitly at the centre of the curriculum and refers to four diverse contexts for planning learner experiences: the ethos and life of the school as a community; opportunities for personal achievement; interdisciplinary learning; and curriculum areas and subjects.

In the CfE philosophy, schools and teachers are considered and empowered to make the decisions needed to provide a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners, and which reflects the uniqueness of their communities. This suggests an approach that gives wide autonomy to schools and their teachers in curriculum design.

Another way of summarising the intentions of CfE (as stated in policy documents) is that children and young people’s rights and entitlements are central to Scotland’s curriculum, and every child and young person is entitled to experience:

- a curriculum that is coherent from age 3 to 18 years
- a broad general education, including well-planned experiences and outcomes across all the curriculum areas from early years through to S3
- a Senior Phase after S3, which provides opportunities to attain and achieve, including to study for qualifications, awards and other planned activities to develop the four capacities
- opportunities for developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, with continuous focus on literacy, numeracy, health and well-being
- opportunities to maximise their individual potential, benefitting from appropriate personal support and challenge
- support to help them move into positive and sustained destinations beyond school.

In terms of the content of learning, within the overall framework, “Experiences” and “Outcomes” describe the expectations for learning and progression in all areas of the curriculum. It is the responsibility of schools and their partners to bring those experiences and outcomes together and apply the national entitlements to produce learning programmes across a broad curriculum, covering the subjects of: Science; Languages; Mathematics; Social Studies; Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being; Religious and Moral Education; and Technologies. In addition, throughout this broad curriculum, there should be an emphasis on the Scottish context, culture and history, and its place in the world.

According to CfE, this planning should demonstrate the following principles for curriculum design:

- challenge and enjoyment
- breadth
- progression
- depth
- personalisation and choice
- coherence
- relevance.

The Curriculum for Excellence framework intends to allow professional autonomy and responsibility when planning and delivering the curriculum. For example, there are no specific input requirements in terms of time allocations. The framework provides flexibility to organise, schedule and deliver the experiences and outcomes in ways that meet the needs of all learners and also provide reassurance about consistency

where necessary. Such flexibility is expected to result in more varied curriculum structures and arrangements to reflect local needs and circumstances.

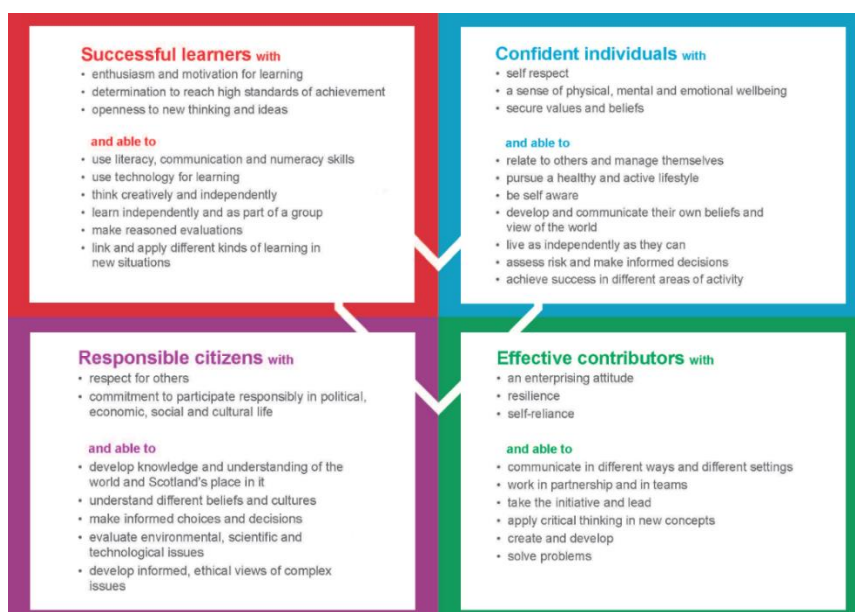
The Curriculum for Excellence vision as a driving force

The vision around the four capacities is widely appreciated, not only in Scotland but also internationally, for its bold, aspirational, value-driven and future-oriented approach, as compared to conventional curriculum thinking in policy making and school practices. As mentioned above, CfE pursues the vision of helping learners aged 3 to 18 years gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes suited to the demands of the 21st century by providing them with a broad competence-based education and helping them develop four capacities: becoming successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The vision has and continues to receive broad support for its values and principles across seemingly all stakeholders, experts and practitioners. The OECD team observed this support throughout the review, during the interviews with practitioners, learners and parents of both primary and secondary education (Annex B). This support for the four capacities and the vision they draw for Scottish learners expands beyond school communities, among policy makers, education professionals and other stakeholders (OECD, 2020^[11]). Also, in the political arena, there is hardly any disagreement about the overall vision. The consensual approach to educational decision making in Scotland has helped create this wide support. Although over the years, some cracks in the appreciation for CfE seem to have emerged, the wide support for the vision is still present, as evidenced in many reports and all assessment conversations.

The CfE vision is also recognised as trendsetting in international curriculum discourses. It has served as a widely cited example due to its principles and compact visualisation of the four capacities and the attributes and capabilities that specify them (Figure 2.2). Competencies such as critical thinking and problem solving, central in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, are two of the most targeted competencies among OECD countries and jurisdictions pursuing 21st century curricula (OECD, 2020^[12]).

Figure 2.2. Attributes and capabilities of the four capacities in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence



Source: Updated description of CfE attributes and capabilities visual, courtesy of the Scottish Government.

In the years following the development of Scotland's vision for its Curriculum for Excellence, OECD countries and jurisdictions such as Australia, Canada (Ontario and British Columbia), Estonia, Finland, Japan, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Wales) also re-designed their curricula to align them with what students need to learn to fulfil their personal, academic and future professional lives in the 21st century. The basic ideas of CfE are still valid (after almost two decades following inception) and still adequately reflect the four broad aims that are nowadays internationally seen as relevant for learning and teaching in education.

The preliminary findings of the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project further support these future-oriented visions of aiming for the holistic development and engagement of learners. The OECD's Learning Compass 2030 also proposes a common framework to conceptualise the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that learners need to fulfil their potential and contribute to the well-being of their communities and more globally (OECD, 2019^[13]). Scotland's approach with CfE has been a continuous reference point in curriculum frameworks and visions internationally (OECD, 2020^[12]). Next to more traditional (academic) knowledge aims, there is more attention placed on competencies that prepare a student for life, for personal development, and for the world of work (with appreciated options for vocational directions and apprenticeships).

CfE seems to have entered the hearts and minds of many people in many roles across the education spectrum. That is in itself an accomplishment, as beliefs are usually the most difficult to influence in curriculum change (Cuban, 1992^[14]; Fullan, 2008^[6]), particularly when compared with two other important dimensions of change among teachers: use of materials and instructional behaviour. However, there are still traces of some traditional beliefs (e.g. the preference for very broad programmes in terms of many separate subjects) that hinder implementation in terms of programmatic and organisational changes. Moreover, agreeing with the vision of CfE does not automatically imply that behavioural changes, notably in pedagogy, assessment and student practices, are in line with the intentions (see the next section).

Considerable efforts were made to respond to teachers' needs for clarification by developing "Experiences and Outcomes" documents that further describe the expectations for learning and progression in all areas of the curriculum. Taken as a whole, the experiences and outcomes aim to embody the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities (Education Scotland, 2018^[15]). Concerns were raised, however, about the relevance, practicality and effectiveness of the tools aiming to operationalise CfE's vision, such as the attributes and capabilities, and the Experiences and Outcomes (referred to "Es and Os" by practitioners). According to practitioners interviewed by the OECD team, the Es and Os were somewhat useful in defining broad steps in learners' progression but not connected enough to learning tasks and outcomes to be useful in curriculum planning.

The OECD team also observed a degree of disconnect between the concepts of knowledge, skills and attitudes or capabilities and attributes present in the four capacities and how they are integrated into CfE learning. In particular, although knowledge elements are mentioned in the listing of curriculum areas (science; languages; mathematics; social studies; expressive arts; health and well-being; religious and moral education; and technologies), they are not explicitly referred to in the four capacities, nor in their elaboration (capabilities and attributes). CfE's vision grants all these elements a complementary role in learning, but there is no clear model of how knowledge, skills and attitudes, capabilities and attributes contribute to learning. In the absence of clarification on what is expected in terms of knowledge as part of the learning process, the role of knowledge appears somewhat fragmented and left to interpretation at the school level, although it is an essential component of learning in CfE's framework. In the overview of attributes and capabilities (Figure 2.2), knowledge is only referred to indirectly in the successful learner capacity's attributes (as literacy and numeracy skills) and in the responsible citizen capacity, but without further detail in the experiences and outcomes about what "knowledge" is referring to.

While it may be implicit in the eight curriculum areas, the current articulation of knowledge, as referred to in numeracy and literacy, seems to create ambiguity on the role of knowledge and its balance throughout

CfE from ages 3 to 18. Following discussions with stakeholders, the OECD team observed a notable pattern: the Senior Phase seems focused primarily on disciplinary knowledge, while BGE seems to have a more balanced approach in terms of weaving in the four capacities. Students interviewed spoke about the challenges they faced in making the transition from BGE into Senior Phase when they had not consolidated the basic knowledge required for the deeper learning underpinning the Senior Phase. The lack of clarity around knowledge may be understood due to an overly cautious reaction to previously overloaded, content-dominated programmes. It may be that the place given to knowledge in CfE is too implicit and that the overall representation of capacities creates the misleading impression that a strong knowledge base is no longer a priority.

The conceptualisation of knowledge is difficult, particularly for education systems attempting to move away from traditional, content-dominated curricula. Knowledge does not necessarily need to be equated with specified subject content and can be discipline-based (in smaller or broader learning areas), as well as interdisciplinary-oriented (around themes or in projects). Moreover, knowledge has multiple aspects, both conceptual and declarative, as well as procedural and epistemic. For instance, the OECD Learning Framework 2030, a product of the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project, distinguishes four different types of knowledge, which can help better nuance its position in a curriculum (OECD, 2019^[16]):

- **Disciplinary knowledge** includes subject-specific concepts and detailed content, such as that learnt in the study of mathematics and language, for example.
- **Interdisciplinary knowledge** involves relating the concepts and content of one discipline or subject to the concepts and content of other disciplines or subjects.
- **Epistemic knowledge** is the understanding of how expert practitioners of disciplines work and think. This knowledge helps students find the purpose of learning, understand the application of learning and extend their disciplinary knowledge.
- **Procedural knowledge** is the understanding of how something is done, the series of steps or actions taken to accomplish a goal. Some procedural knowledge is domain-specific, some is transferable across domains.

Boyd's framework of "knowledge and ways of knowing" (2019^[17]) similarly highlights the importance of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. This framework also introduces the concept of "ways of knowing", which is closely related to the development of epistemic knowledge and learner abilities, such as self-directed learning and growth mindset.

In general, the progress made in curriculum research since the formulation of CfE's vision in 2000 and broader changes in education and society since then offer opportunities to consider some of the vision's core elements, such as the role of knowledge in 21st century curricula. Other countries pursuing competency-driven curricula, close in ambition to Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, have developed models to clarify the role and interaction of key elements of learning such as knowledge, thus supporting schools' and teachers' development of their curriculum and teaching strategies. For instance, British Columbia (Canada) re-designed its curriculum framework for school education in the 21st century and developed a curriculum model to help schools and teachers develop their curriculum and teaching practices, including a concept-based approach to learning (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Curriculum model in British Columbia (Canada)

British Columbia (Canada) re-designed its curriculum framework for school education in the 21st century, building on a concept-based approach to learning and driven by the development of competencies to foster deeper, more transferable learning. The curriculum approach emphasises the deeper understanding of concepts and the application of processes than on memorising isolated facts and information. The learning standards and big ideas for each area of learning identify what is essential — what students are expected to know, be able to do, and understand at each grade.

The curriculum model *Know-Do-Understand* pulls together the best from modern learning theories and British Columbia teachers' advice. The curriculum model is made up of three elements: content, curricular competencies, and big ideas. "Content (Know)" defines what students are expected to know; "Curricular Competencies (Do)" sets out what students are expected to do; and "Big Ideas (Understand)" indicates what students are expected to understand. Teachers combine the three elements in ways they see fit to personalise learning in their classrooms. The content learning standards — the "know" of the *Know-Do-Understand* model of learning — detail the essential topics and knowledge at each grade level.

Source: Government of British Columbia (Canada), (2016^[18]), "Curriculum Redesign", <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/rethinking-curriculum> [accessed on 29 March 2021].

Moreover, in terms of measuring progress to accomplish the vision of CfE, the National Improvement Framework (NIF) introduced metrics to understand progress in two key areas of CfE learning: literacy and numeracy. However, the OECD team reflected on whether the focus on these areas clarified the curriculum policy intentions and successfully communicated the progress made in terms of the richness of CfE learning by students or whether it narrowed its priorities. While the NIF emphasises progress on literacy and numeracy, students learning under CfE would benefit from additional evidence on deeper knowledge, health and well-being, and other domains prioritised by CfE.

There appears to be a rich amount of quantitative data collected on Scottish education, but only limited systematic information about what occurs in classrooms implementing CfE. There is a grey area between the intended vision and the attained curriculum. There is selected evidence, and the evidence pack provided by the Scottish Government to the OECD team included a vivid set of case studies of schools that have implemented CfE (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]). The OECD team also collected anecdotal evidence from parents who considered that their children had developed a range of knowledge and skills that embody CfE, such as analytical skills, international and social awareness or strong teamwork, for example. However, the team considers that there is a lack of consolidated evidence of CfE practices in schools, hampering a more precise and evidence-informed diagnosis of the curriculum in action and its outcomes.

Following the development of a range of concepts to develop CfE since its inception, there were concerns about the increasing complexity of the underpinning documentation for practitioners to realise the CfE vision. Following a recommendation made in the OECD (2015^[20]) report, a group initiated by the Curriculum and Assessment Board, and composed of practitioners, researchers and system leaders collaborated to develop a "refreshed narrative" for Curriculum for Excellence, aiming to consolidate the different documents describing CfE, clarify its core elements and support the process of curriculum design at the school level. It was developed for two broad purposes: to provide a single point of entry to guide practitioners amidst a range of curriculum advice; and to facilitate engagement with the core principles and big ideas of CfE and development of practices to enact these big ideas (Scottish Government, 2019^[10]).

This OECD assessment has not observed any particular impact of the refreshed narrative, perhaps due to the short amount of time between its introduction and this assessment. However, several elements suggest that the refreshed narrative may not necessarily fulfil its mission. First, practitioners and policy makers interviewed by the OECD team suggested the refreshed narrative may not have addressed ambiguities of some key concepts of CfE, such as the role of knowledge in learning within the CfE vision and how the four capacities, including their attributes and capabilities, relate to learning practices and observable outcomes. It was also suggested that practitioners might not necessarily focus on the refreshed narrative amidst the vast amount of existing CfE-related documents and their previous ten years of practice.

While there have been efforts to clarify the vision set within Curriculum for Excellence, the OECD team noted some misalignment and lack of clarity between its aims and objectives and actual provision and transitions from ages 3 to 18. Overall, in BGE, especially in primary schools and for students who study to prepare Advanced Highers, selected evidence and stakeholder interviews suggest that the learning aims and objectives align with the vision defined by CfE and the four capacities.

There is a gap, however, in terms of the overall curriculum goals and the qualifications students prepare for during the Senior Phase. Under CfE, the Senior Phase aims to provide opportunities to achieve deeper learning and study for qualifications, awards and other planned activities to develop the four capacities. In practice, the alignment between the learning aims and objectives and the four capacities in the Senior Phase is limited by the type of assessments and subsequent learning practices imposed by restrictive coursework to prepare for national qualifications. While these qualifications can be considered as statements about the specific goals of learning, their emphasis seems to deviate from CfE's broader curriculum philosophy and aims. This narrow focus also appears to have backwash effects on teaching practices and learning experiences in the last years of BGE (OECD, 2020^[11]). The emphasis on preparing for exams in secondary education also seems to widen the gap between the vision set in CfE and the practice, as the exams and qualifications may show a limited representation of the broad capacities. For instance, the OECD team heard repeated calls from both learners and parents for a stronger emphasis on preparation for life and work than thus far realised in many current school practices.

On the other hand, CfE's ideals of excellence and equity are well regarded and supported in Scotland. The system's ambitions are embodied in the broad learning aims set for all students during their schooling and in the policy goal of closing the achievement gap between students from different backgrounds. Targeted policies are developed to respond to this ambition. International evidence, including from Scotland's past performance, shows that high-performing education systems can sustain both excellence in student learning and high levels of equity, meaning that excellent learning achievements are not determined by socio-economic background (OECD, 2019^[21]). Some stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team expressed a continued tension between the ideals of excellence and equity in CfE, however. Overall, although they support this aspirational goal, stakeholders highlighted that the education system by itself could contribute but not fully achieve it (OECD, 2020^[11]; 2015^[20]).

Overall, the OECD team considers it wise to maintain the core message of the CfE vision, given its collective development and widespread support. However, while the ideas on paper and in policy are clear, the OECD team's visits, research and analysis conducted on CfE suggest a gap between the intentions set out in CfE, and stakeholders' diverse interpretations and different practices of CfE across Scotland. While this is partly the intention of CfE in terms of autonomy concerning its implementation, it might be worth taking a fresh, critical and creative look at the vision again in light of almost two decades of many societal, scientific, health, political and technological changes that have taken place at both national and global scales. Reviewing what those relatively abstract statements mean and imply for choices in the curriculum for student learning could be a valid exercise to define the next steps.

From the perspective of students, the vision seems globally integrated with Broad General Education for students up to 15 years of age, but less so in the Senior Phase. At this level of education, stakeholders and researchers highlight a gap in practice in terms of CfE aspirations and actual focus on student learning.

This may be because the implementation of that last stage of the 3 to 18 trajectory started later than for BGE, from 2014 onwards, and has had less time to integrate. However, it may also show different tensions, including mismatches between indicators to measure CfE outcomes; between external assessments and CfE expectations; and between progression across the four capacities. Clarifying the metrics of what CfE accomplishes and closing this gap between the vision and practice in the Senior Phase will be at the heart of success in the future development of CfE.

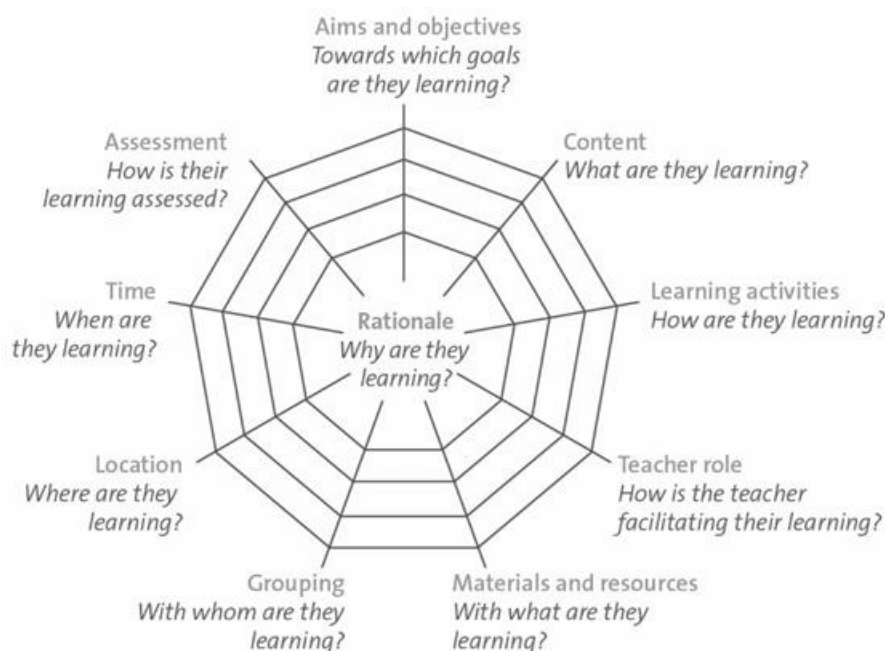
Coherence of the Curriculum for Excellence components

Curriculum for Excellence was developed following a national debate in Scotland in the early 2000s. The first statement of intent was published in 2004, followed by a *Building the Curriculum* series until 2010. These documents, developed in collaboration with national and local partners, set out the broad parameters of CfE, with schools and local authorities encouraged to innovate and find local approaches to planning and delivering the curriculum. *Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching* (2008^[22]) is a key document in the series. It sets out the curriculum levels, the eight curriculum areas and principles for curriculum design. “Experiences and Outcomes” followed, setting out concise statements about children’s learning and progression in each curriculum area set across five curriculum levels. Benchmarks were developed over 2016/17, complementing the experiences and outcomes and trying to clarify what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels. They also provide support for consistency in teachers’ and other practitioners’ professional judgements when it comes to assessing the achievement of a level.

Traditionally, a curriculum is primarily associated with the aims, content and organisation of learning (Walker, 1990^[23]), but various authors (Klein, 1991^[24]; van den Akker, 2003^[4]) have expanded this list of components to present a more comprehensive image of a curriculum, including: vision or rationale, goals and objectives, contents, materials and resources, learning activities, teaching strategies, assessment, grouping, time and location. When trying to re-design a curriculum and making it work in practice, it is important to pay attention to the coherence of those components. The (normative) vision on the overarching, broader aims of learning and teaching (analysed in the previous section) serves as a central link, providing glue and connecting all other curriculum components. A metaphor to illustrate this viewpoint is a spider web (Figure 2.3), which includes guiding questions for the many curriculum components (Thijs and van den Akker, 2009^[8]; van den Akker, 2003^[4]). The curricular spider web points to both the flexibility and the vulnerability of a curriculum, as every chain is as strong as its weakest element, while all components are inter-related and inter-connected.

Besides a visual representation of the challenging components, the curricular spider web can serve as an analytical tool to explore and clarify the discrepancies between the existing and desired curriculum, as well as a design tool that assists developers (including teachers) in prioritising the next steps in the process of getting to a coherent curriculum. Impressions about various components of CfE, according to the spider web, are presented in the following sub-sections, with special attention drawn to perceived gaps between the implementation of the intended curriculum in school and actual classroom practices.

Figure 2.3. The curricular spider web



Source: Thijs, A. and J. van den Akker (2009^[8]), *Curriculum in Development*; van den Akker, J. (2003^[4]), "Curriculum perspectives: An introduction".

Contents and student learning

Learning in CfE aims to be holistic and centred on the learner, as emphasised by the four capacities. Students are expected to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. The CfE framework encompasses four contexts for learning: curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning, ethos and life of the school, and opportunities for personal achievements. To embed these, and as mentioned above, learning is structured around three interdisciplinary areas (literacy, numeracy and health and well-being) and eight curriculum areas: Expressive Arts; Languages; Religious and Moral Education; Social Studies; Mathematics; Sciences; Technologies; Health and Well-being. Some of these curriculum areas are priorities of the Scottish Government and receive dedicated funding.

For instance, literacy and numeracy are two priorities set out in CfE and the National Improvement Framework. The approach to support literacy is built on a Literacy Action Plan, which informs a range of government-funded programmes. To tackle the priorities for numeracy and mathematics education, Scottish authorities follow and implement recommendations from the *Making Maths Count* report (2016) (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]).

The *STEM Education and Training Strategy for Scotland*, published in 2017, is a targeted five-year programme of actions that aims to encourage the development of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) capabilities and skills to improve opportunities for all, meet employer skills requirements, drive inclusive economic growth and allow Scotland to flourish and compete on a global platform. It includes actions in early years and school education, community learning, colleges, universities, apprenticeships and science centres and festivals. In schools, this includes supporting professional learning to increase teacher confidence in delivering STEM, implementation of the Young STEM Leaders programme, development of a STEM Nation Award to recognise excellence in schools delivering STEM, the collation of an online directory of inspirational resources for schools, and expansion of the Improving

Gender Balance Programme to tackle unconscious bias and gender stereotyping. Progress on this activity is reported annually, including data on key performance indicators (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]).

Another priority for Scotland is the health and well-being of children, young people, and other members of educational communities. The aspiration is to help children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities to build emotional and physical well-being and resilience. CfE has a central role in promoting it, with a dedicated curriculum area and set of Experiences and Outcomes. Its approach is based on a shared responsibility across education levels to make children and young people feel nurtured, safe, respected and included in the learning environment.

The area of social studies aims to help learners understand their own country, the history and heritage of Scotland and the challenges it faces. Specific actions to support social studies involves granting funds to external “delivery partners” who work with schools to provide activities in this learning area, bring external speakers to talk to learners, and organise school trips. Support is also provided to specific themes such as Holocaust education, heritage education and social enterprise in schools.

Language education includes specific actions to preserve the Gaelic and Scots languages, support British Sign Language and develop further learning of all languages from Primary 1 onwards. The 1+2 languages policy aims to enable all learners to study three languages by their third year of education, which has required additional support and funding to guarantee a diverse offer at the school level since 2013 (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]).

In general, the OECD team observed and learnt from its interviews with school-level actors that the diversity and holistic approach to learning is consistently adopted in primary schools. The approaches to student learning referenced above appear activity-based and show flexible variation (in line with CfE intentions) in primary, and to some extent, lower-secondary education. The school case studies provided in the evidence pack (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]) are testament to the richness of practices for student learning aligned to CfE, in addition to some of the evidence presented by students during discussions with the OECD team and data on improvements in outcomes provided in the NIF annual reports.

The holistic approach also seems to be followed in most secondary schools in the first two years (S1 and S2), although it was often described as challenging by teachers, school leaders and learners. One of the most salient reasons highlighted was the seeming misalignment between the content and learning framework of CfE and the requirements prescribed in national courses for qualifications taken in secondary education. Learning in the Senior Phase was described as being aligned to National Course prescriptions, to best prepare students for important exams required to complete education and move onto the next stages. Such learning does not follow the same structure and principles as CfE (see Chapter 4). As a result, the learning approaches designed in CfE are not fully realised in secondary schools.

Student learning patterns show more traditional learning activities at the upper-secondary level (Senior Phase), with its strong focus on exam accreditation. Senior Phase students reported an emphasis on rote learning and memorisation, which they described as “boring”, and on preparing to succeed in the tasks required for qualifications (OECD, 2020^[11]). They have fewer opportunities to experience more engaging, intrinsically motivating activities related to problem solving, creativity, co-operation or communication. Interestingly, students reported that they experienced more meaningful approaches to learning in the Advanced Higher courses, which seem to better reflect the CfE vision. Although less explicit, teachers and school leaders also expressed their concerns about the limited instructional patterns in the Senior Phase in relation to CfE. They referred to the need for traditional practices to remain in place as the most efficient way to help students obtain their qualifications.

In some instances, CfE’s aspiration to place the student at the centre of learning appears at odds with competing agendas of standardisation (also induced by policy messages and measures) and preparing students for the workforce (Britton, Schweisfurth and Slade, 2018^[25]), especially in the later years. Existing accountability mechanisms focus on narrower outcomes than suggested in CfE’s vision, which creates

incentives for Senior Phase students and secondary schools to hold on to traditional learning, teaching and assessment practices that do not align with the practices and pedagogy relevant to CfE (Hayward, 2018^[26]).

All stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team concurred with the observation that the first three years of secondary education (S1-S3) are increasingly influenced by the need to prepare students for the Senior Phase and its national course exams, with less emphasis placed on designing a curriculum to meet their needs as envisaged by CfE. This appears to be a consequence of both unresolved design issues within CfE and student assessment policies, among other factors. School practitioners observed that the purpose and focus of S2 in particular – a legacy of the 5 to 14 structure that predated CfE – continues to shape its delivery and learners' experience. Preliminary findings from research conducted with school leaders in Scotland found that a considerable proportion of schools asked students to start choosing subjects in S2 (51% of schools, as reported by the school leaders surveyed) and sometimes as early as S1 (14%) (Shapira et al., 2021^[27]). Research conducted in Ireland found that the second year of the secondary phase has particular importance for the future engagement and retention of students in the school system; students in the longitudinal study who were not engaged by their second year experience did not re-engage in later years (Smyth et al., 2006^[28]).

The lack of alignment of these secondary education years to the CfE vision has historical and structural roots. The structure of the later years of secondary education did not evolve alongside CfE. Given the historically valued preference for a broad curriculum offering in Scottish education and its objective as part of CfE, there are debates around the number of curriculum areas to be chosen by students. As CfE aims to provide both breadth and depth of learning, without agreement on what constitutes an education that is both broad and deep, schools lack clarity on the number of subjects their students should study and the appropriate structure to support their progression. The high number of classes taken in BGE – up to 15 and 17 according to school testimonies (OECD, 2020^[11]) – might result in fragmentation and superficiality (with few hours available for each subject per week). Among official submissions echoing stakeholders' concerns to the Scottish Parliament, Universities Scotland specified that learners usually choose around seven or eight subjects for National 4 and five in S2, then a narrower set of subjects for S5/S6, and warned against the risk of further narrowing and “pigeon-holing” students at too early an age (Scottish Parliament - Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]). The number of subjects in the Senior Phase is seen by some as too low, as they are narrowing a broad education, limiting choice to students and offering insufficient preparation and depth into disciplinary knowledge due to the focus on qualification preparation (OECD, 2020^[11]). Others believe that the importance of broad choice is perhaps over-emphasised, as it may create tensions with the desired deeper understanding of knowledge.

The OECD team noted schools' commitment to conceive curriculum models that offer a wide variety of learning experiences, subjects and qualifications (see Box 2.2 for an example). The issue of subject choice was initially considered as an example of local curriculum flexibility. Different pathways have developed, especially with a wide array of vocational choices also delivered by colleges. The variation of subject choice between schools may have unforeseen consequences for learner progression, however, given the historical importance of subject choice in Scotland. There seems to be an issue about the real choice options students have, given the variation between schools, depending on the context, capacity and resources (Shapira and Priestley, 2018^[29]), which touches on equity concerns. Of note in discussions between the OECD team and stakeholders were some observations about the constraints placed on schools by some local authorities in curriculum organisation.

Box 2.2. Curriculum for Excellence, as applied at the Portlethen Academy (secondary school, Aberdeenshire)

Vision: To be the very best we can be.

Values: Learn and improve. Get involved. Think of the consequences. Respect all.

Rationale: Attainment for all and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) have been central planks of our thinking and we have worked to establish a flexible and broad curriculum that is responsive to pupils' needs, interests and aspirations. The offer aims to provide pathways that have strong links to the workplace and to Skills for Life, Learning and Work for all young people. We aim to be flexible and provide experiences that allow young people to focus on interests but are not so narrow as to be limiting. The offer also provides experiences and certification for young people who do not fit the "traditional" profile of the N5s and Highers offer.

Design traits: The curriculum is based on the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. A skills framework is built into curricular content. A personalisation process is offered to pupils as they move from S2 into S3. All of the Senior Phase years (S4-S6) are timetabled together. The Senior Phase has a wide curricular offer: young people can choose and achieve qualifications in subjects that allow for progression into employment, further education and higher education. There is a strong focus on Developing the Young Workforce throughout all stages of the curricular offer, including numerous qualifications and courses (Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Award [NPA] Enterprise and Employability). Links with North East Scotland College (NESCol) widen the Senior Phase curricular offer. The school is involved in the Excelerate programme in conjunction with the Wood Foundation with a developing focus on project-based learning. Key partnerships are developed to enhance learning, e.g. with community learning and development (CLD) (Gear Up To Go), the Mackie Academy and Mearns Academy (Moving Forward), and the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust.

Concretely, the curriculum for the last three years of Broad General Education (lower-secondary) implies:

- Pupils follow a curriculum in S1 and S2 designed to give experiences in all subjects they can select from in S3/Senior Phase.
- A personalisation process as pupils progress from S2 into S3.
- A high level of support offered when personalising the curriculum at the end of S2.
- Moving Forward curricular input is offered in conjunction with two neighbouring schools for targeted pupils in S3.
- The curricular offer is developed with the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust to offer a tailored pathway linked to health and well-being and sport, which leads into an offer in the Senior Phase.
- S3 pupils complete awards during core subjects (e.g. the Religious Beliefs and Values Award in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies [RMPS], the Employability Award in Personal Social Education [PSE]).

In the same school, the Senior Phase curriculum implies:

- S4: Six subjects, including English and Mathematics. Maths and Applications of Mathematics are both offered and completed by pupils in S4 to enhance attainment. S4 students complete awards during core subjects.
- S5: Five subjects plus an enrichment option (allows for additional subjects/qualifications).
- S6: Four or five subjects, plus an enrichment option.

- Pupils choosing a National 4 or National 5 course also complete a Personal Finance qualification.
- S5 pupils complete a Personal Development award at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 from session 2020/21.
- S6 pupils complete a Leadership Award at SCQF Level 6 from session 2020/21.
- A wide offer of qualifications (National Qualification [NQ], NPA, SQA Awards, Foundation Apprenticeships).
- Foundation Apprenticeships are offered in Accountancy, Children and Young People and Health and Social Care and a pilot Foundation Apprenticeship in Creative and Digital Media (2019/20), and in four additional frameworks (Business Skills, Engineering, Information Technology [IT] Software, Scientific Technologies) in 2020/21.
- Additional pilots explored (SCQF Levels 4 and 5) with the support of the local authority and the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust.

Source: Scottish Government (2021^[19]), *Curriculum for Excellence 2020-2021 - OECD review: initial evidence pack*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/oecd-independent-review-curriculum-excellence-2020-2021-initial-evidence-pack/> [accessed on 24 March 2021].

More reflection seems advisable on the actual degree and nature of student choice. In discussions with education stakeholders, the focus on academic preparation in traditional subjects was predominant. The strong focus on the number of subjects in comparison to the modest attention to the actual quality (relevance, consistency, practicality, effectiveness) of teaching and learning fit for the 21st century at this level appears to be an issue. This is also illustrated in parliamentary debates on Curriculum for Excellence, where stakeholders expressed the view that learners in all schools should follow a similar number of courses each year; and that greater prescription should be provided on a core set of subjects in the curriculum (Scottish Parliament - Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]).

Prescribing the same number of courses for all students, regardless of their preferences for post-secondary routes and destinations, may not be optimal, however. Doing so does not seem aligned with some of the policy intentions mentioned above or with quality. In the Education Scotland (2020^[30]) report about curriculum in secondary education, Her Majesty's (HM) Inspectors of Education noted that the focus of professional debate needs to be less about the number of subjects or courses and more about how to deliver the Senior Phase entitlement in creative ways. Teachers and school leaders also noted that Senior Phase curricula need to meet the range of young people's needs and develop their skills, attributes and capabilities as well as opportunities to attain qualifications that support positive destinations, taking into account the school's unique context. Inspectors also noted that the extent to which the curriculum offered leads to positive outcomes for young people depends on several factors; it is not just about the number of subjects offered in any one year in the Senior Phase. Some of these factors include the quality of change leadership; students' own perception and day-to-day experience of the curriculum; the curriculum enacted in the quality of learning and teaching; the effectiveness of BGE in supporting progression to the Senior Phase; and the range and quality of learning pathways provided that best meets the needs of learners within the school (Education Scotland, 2020^[30]).

This focus on subject choice, however, and the failure to address the problems associated with it has also had implications for how the CfE commitment to a broad curriculum translates at the school level. Breadth is one of the design principles of CfE and was defined in guidance for practitioners on assessing student achievement as "the number and range of experiences and outcomes encountered by learners" (Education Scotland, 2012^[31]). In a discussion of interdisciplinary learning in *Building the Curriculum 3* (Scottish Government, 2008^[22]), this was defined as "space for learning beyond subject boundaries", where learning

can be organised based on groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas.

Interviewing system leaders, teachers, students and their parents, the OECD team was struck by how differently they understood breadth in CfE. For most stakeholders, breadth was defined by offering as many subjects as can practically be made available in secondary schools to give students as much choice as possible in moving to the Senior Phase. This is not an unreasonable position of schools given the backwash of qualifications and the professional profile of teachers as subject specialists. An enquiry by the Scottish Parliament in 2019 into subject choices noted the tensions between the aspiration for a wide choice and what was termed by one witness as “the six-column environment” (where students choose their options from across six columns) (Scottish Parliament - Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]). There was no discussion of the meaning of breadth beyond access to subjects. Yet, originally, breadth was envisaged as providing students with opportunities to connect within and across disciplines and with real-life contexts and problems. What CfE proposed was not the end of subjects but a curriculum that made explicit efforts to afford students with those opportunities. In discussions with stakeholders from primary schools, interdisciplinary studies were mentioned but as a marginal activity in curriculum making and student learning. Discussions with those in secondary schools did not raise the issue of interdisciplinary studies.

Another important issue related to the content in the Senior Phase is the balance between knowledge and skills. This issue links back to the analysis of CfE’s vision and its lack of clarity on the role of knowledge in learning and the CfE framework. Some suggest that the disciplinary knowledge offered is too limited to adequately prepare students for academic studies. In contrast, others found this less problematic and argue that depth of acquisition and broader competencies are more important for future learning and studies.

The OECD team suggests developing a more nuanced view of the role of knowledge in relation to aspired skills or competencies (defined as the interaction between knowledge, skills and attitudes). It is internationally common to gradually move from many subjects (partly grouped into broad learning areas) to a smaller amount of more discipline-based subjects in the academically oriented streams in upper-secondary education (O’Donnell, 2018^[32]). Such subject-oriented courses offer more chances to acquire deeper learning and understanding, which is also beneficial for generic learning ability. However, one would hope that within those subjects, deliberate attempts are made to clarify and demonstrate how such subject-focused learning can contribute to broader aims and themes, including attention to the four capacities.

Overall, the OECD team found that, in contrast to how BGE has adopted CfE across the board, the substantive design of the qualification-based courses in the Senior Phase is not consistently in line with the CfE philosophy and does not offer a clear transition for students from BGE into the Senior Phase. Various comments and observations suggest that the previous curriculum emphasis on subjects (including standards) and its organisation in previous structures still dominate and have not adequately been revised and adapted. Policies about subjects and breadth in the secondary phase did not develop as needed to support the original vision of CfE during the implementation period. These legacy gaps give rise to the risk of the “mile-wide-inch-deep” curriculum happening in S1-S3, as identified by the OECD in several education systems in a study on curriculum overload (OECD, 2020^[11]). They are now impeding the further development of CfE and curtailing its aspirations for learners in secondary schools.

The role of teachers

Teachers in Scotland are regarded as well educated and respected professionals. The many teachers the OECD team had conversations with confirmed this reputation. Overall, the team recognises a strong commitment to varied teaching approaches for student learning and curriculum design. During general education, teachers appear to be quite successful in that respect. Many testimonies were heard of their

efforts to develop CfE for their students, of their engagement in learning and in moderation to ensure they were assessing their students well, particularly in primary and lower-secondary education. The case studies in the evidence pack also present concrete teaching practices and approaches (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]).

Less clarity seems to exist about pedagogical approaches that are well aligned to CfE in (particularly senior) secondary education. Both teachers and school leaders reported ambiguities and difficulties in realising CfE principles and instructional ideals at this level. The move from general teachers to specialised subject teachers in secondary education may imply more specialisation and less integration of learning to meet the principles of CfE. As mentioned in the previous section, such varied and challenging approaches are hard to enact in a context where passing externally set assessments, including national exams (that reflect quite different emphases) is an obvious priority in the immediate interest of students (and their parents).

In terms of commitment to curriculum renewal, the complex context for educational reform - with many competing priorities and tasks and with tensions between autonomy and regulation - seems to diminish the focus on “quality teaching for quality learning” (Chapman, 2019^[33]). This policy context also reduces opportunities for “teacher agency”, according to selected academics (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015^[34]), where teachers (not only individually but also in teams) have more substantial influence in shaping their day-to-day curriculum work. Obviously, translating curriculum policy documents into classroom realities is a complex and demanding task; it needs space, time and support for teacher professional development (Wallace and Priestley, 2016^[35]). While many efforts for this professional development have been initiated, and many teachers have been developing curricula and sharing practices across schools and networks, it is clear that sustained investments are needed.

Materials and resources

CfE has produced large amounts of guidance materials for teachers to support them in developing their own curricula in schools and classrooms. Given the allocated curriculum autonomy and demands by teachers for guidance, these are important efforts by the Scottish government to support the development of CfE in schools. As the curriculum was being implemented, a range of guidance and support materials was generated at both the national and local level. This led, over time, to a perception of overload by practitioners, as reported to the OECD team.

Action was taken at the national level to significantly streamline all support and guidance materials for the curriculum. In 2016, a definitive “Statement for Practitioners” from HM Chief Inspector of Education was published (Education Scotland, 2016^[36]). The statement acknowledged that there was too much support material and guidance for practitioners at both the national and local levels, which was contributing to the growth of over-bureaucratic approaches to planning and assessment in many schools and classrooms across the country. The statement was intended to provide clear, practical advice for teachers and practitioners on the planning of learning, teaching and assessment across the curriculum. It summarised the key components of the curriculum framework within which teachers and practitioners were expected to teach.

The OECD team recognises that important efforts, resources and engagement have been invested to develop CfE after its initial design. This continued policy attention is impressive. However, an unintended consequence is that the many curriculum-related documents, tools and instruments have become rather complex. The evolving CfE seems overloaded with numerous elements: the vision around its four capacities (with attributes and capabilities); seven principles; eight curriculum areas; curriculum entitlements; qualifications; expectations and outcomes; benchmarks; moderations; progression levels; and more. Although the efforts aimed to bring more clarity, often in response to practitioners’ concerns and questions, taken together, this somewhat overwhelming image has elicited some criticism, e.g. a “cluttered”, “over-accessorised” curriculum, which includes specific, somewhat unnecessary, jargon.

The complexity inherent to CfE makes it not only challenging for foreign outsiders (such as the OECD team) to grasp in its totality, but it also reduces the clarity and consistency for practitioners, hampering actionable curriculum design on the ground. Moreover, while CfE policy intends to stimulate flexibility for local curriculum design, it can place this flexibility at risk, as the multitude of measures and documents suggests an output regulation with high prescription. The amount of ongoing policy and support documents seems somewhat in contrast with the espoused autonomy and flexibility for school leaders and teachers to be the major agents for change themselves. This contrast is reflected in the frequent policy vocabulary about “delivery”, which might suggest that practitioners have an obligation to hand over the curriculum (as a package from above) to their learners. In the literature about education policy implementation, the term and process of “policy delivery” refer to top-down approaches to implementation which leave little agency to school leaders, teachers, learners and other stakeholders (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[2]).

The OECD team also heard concerns about the clarity and practicality of the documentation produced around CfE. According to the stakeholders interviewed, teachers need other kinds of materials, or additional support and coaching, to feel comfortable enacting the curriculum. Based on what the OECD team could observe during school visits and analysis of school case studies, most instructional materials seem to be site-specific, developed by teachers themselves, within their own school or in networks with colleagues of schools in their region.

Compared to many other countries, Scottish teachers seem to rely much less on textbooks produced by educational publishers. This may be seen as a sign of strong professional capacity among teachers. However, it also raises some questions about efficiency, as developing high-quality instructional materials requires a lot of expertise, time and energy, while teachers often lack time for this type of work.

Schools and teachers internationally are increasingly given responsibility in curriculum management in countries and jurisdictions where curriculum adaptations or autonomy are granted at the local or school level to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of students and local communities. However, some education systems report that curriculum overload tends to be heavier at the local level, with teachers and schools overburdened by the responsibilities such autonomy entails. This is often due to one of two extremes: either a lack of guidance on what to remove and what to prioritise in curriculum content or guidelines that are too prescriptive. In some instances, teachers may also have difficulty combining new competencies and subjects with traditional disciplines, contributing to greater overload (OECD, 2020^[37]).

The use of (non-prescriptive and adaptable) exemplary or “educative” materials (Ball and Cohen, 1996^[38]; Davis and Krajcik, 2005^[39]) has been shown to free up time and energy for teachers for (preferably joint) professional capacity building during adaptation of such materials to their specific contexts. It may be an option to make the multitude of many separate curriculum policy tools less overwhelming and more actionable for teachers by translating and integrating them into materials that exemplify those essential parts of the curriculum that are experienced as particularly challenging by teachers. Systematic evaluation and subsequent sharing of high-quality materials (such as exemplars) in networks and digital platforms (for instance, through Glow) may offer welcome opportunities to support efficient (re)design of practices and professional learning in Scotland.

Grouping, location and time

The grouping component was less prominent in conversations between the OECD team and practitioners. Few specific comments or problems about grouping of learners were made, with one exception seldom raised during the interviews: organisational and pedagogical challenges about differentiation within multi-level classes. “Multi-course” teaching in Scotland relates to a situation in which a teacher must attempt to teach coursework for different levels of qualifications in the same class. The OECD team understood that this issue had taken prominence in discussions around teaching and learning in secondary schools. Analysis by the Scottish Secondary Teachers’ Association (SSTA) and the Royal Society of Edinburgh was brought to the attention of the OECD team. However, given the limited expression of

concerns among stakeholders and teachers relative to other issues, the OECD team was not in a position to add further evidence-based analysis of this issue. The Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee already recommended that Education Scotland and the SQA undertake work to identify which subjects might be compatible with multi-level teaching (as reported by the Committee Convener to the OECD team).

Similarly, a few specific remarks were made on curriculum location as defined in the spider web. In recent years, investments in school buildings and facilities have been made. Unsurprisingly, the recent COVID-19 crisis has kickstarted improving the IT infrastructure.

The team also noticed some ambiguity around the scheduling of courses in S3 and above. Concerns were reported about the limited time to go into depth for the various subjects, which is reviewed in the depth versus breadth section. In addition, the recent COVID-19 circumstances have led to class periods longer than the usual 45 minutes. Learners in particular (as well as teachers) appreciated this change as the longer class periods offer more opportunities for varied and deep learning.

Assessment

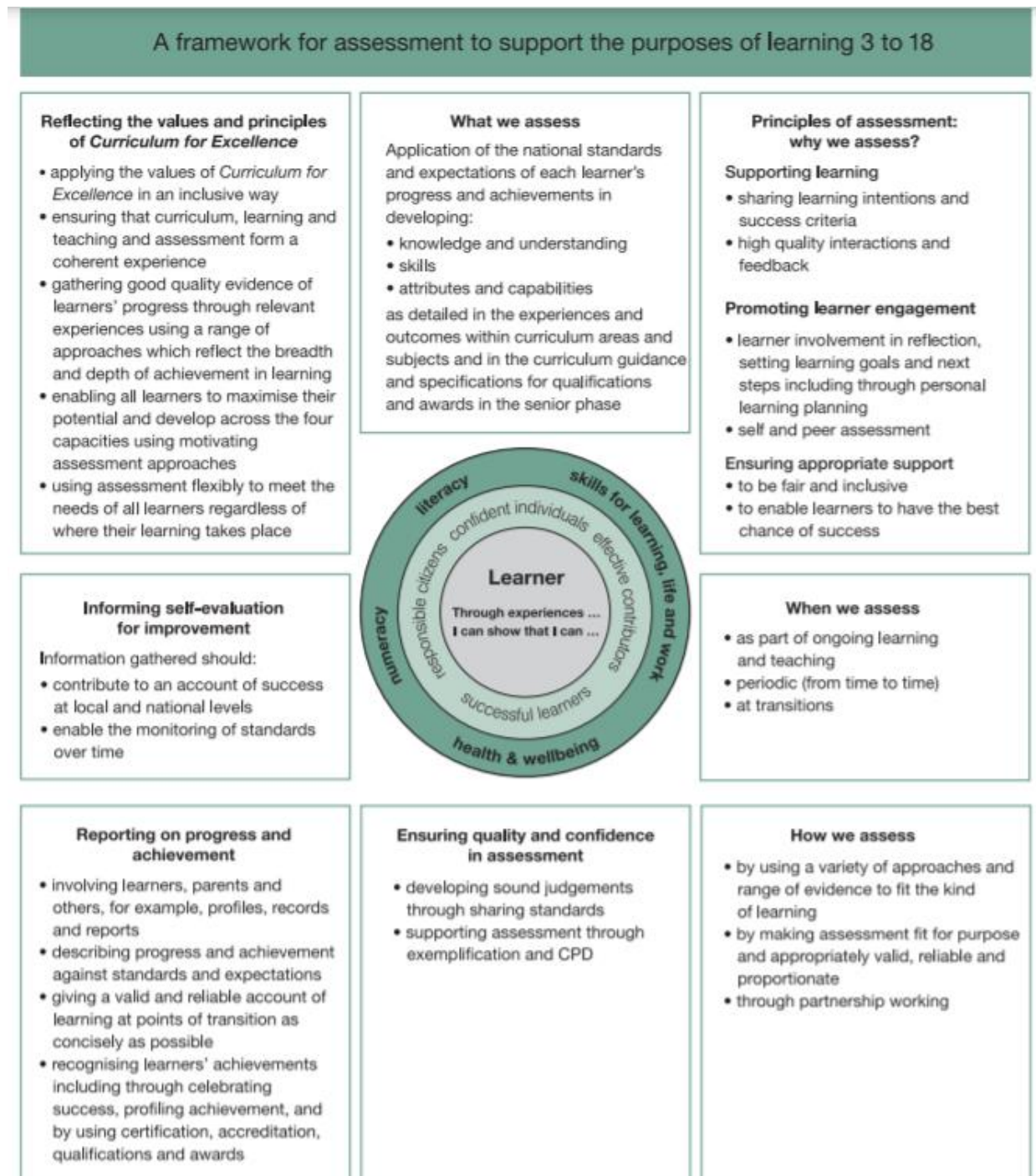
As part of the CfE policy, a comprehensive assessment framework was proposed in *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment*, a key piece of the CfE framework published in 2011 (Figure 2.4). *Building the Curriculum 5* was intended to be the main piece of guidance in relation to assessment advice, both in the BGE and across the entire learner journey from ages 3 to 18 years (Scottish Government, 2011_[40]). It was supported by supplementary guidance, covering the following aspects: reporting; understanding and applying shared standards; recognising achievement, profiling and reporting; and quality assurance and moderation.

In 2017, guidance on benchmarks was published to complement CfE, which set out what learners needed to know and be able to do upon achievement of a curriculum level. A wide range of programmes of support for assessment and moderation were developed through collaboration between Education Scotland, local authorities and practitioners. They provided practitioners with opportunities to share, engage and reflect on the assessment and moderation of CfE levels across the BGE (Scottish Government, 2021_[19]).

Following the proposed framework, student assessment is promoted as an integral part of learning and teaching and considered an ongoing process used for formative as well as summative purposes. Up to S3, assessment by teachers is supposed to be the main mode of assessing students' achievements. Experiences and Outcomes are a set of statements about students' learning and progression in each curriculum area in BGE, intended to help teachers and learners plan to learn and assess progress. Experiences and Outcomes are designed to provide for progression in learners' knowledge, skills and deep understanding and determine the framework for teaching and learning in CfE. At Senior Phase, students' choices of national qualification courses, work-based learning and other qualifications and awards define different progression frameworks. Learners may choose a blend of national courses and other types of coursework depending on their interests, learning projects and intentions for post-school destinations.

Benchmarks have been developed to clarify the national standards expected within each curriculum area and each interdisciplinary area at each level. Using the Experiences and Outcomes statements, benchmarks set out lines of progression from Early to Fourth Levels to clarify what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels. They help support consistency in practitioners' professional judgements. Schools are expected to report on curriculum-level achievement for literacy and numeracy, and data are collected and collated at the national level for reporting purposes.

Figure 2.4. Proposed Framework for Assessment within Curriculum for Excellence, 2011



Source: Scottish Government (2011^[40]), *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment*, <https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/btc5-framework.pdf> [accessed on 22 March 2021].

BGE has five levels of progression (early, first, second, third and fourth) that approximately correspond to system levels of pre-school to lower-secondary education. However, CfE's approach to progression allows, in theory, for students to attain levels at their own pace. Achievement of a level is based on teachers' overall professional judgement and informed by a range of evidence against the benchmarks defined for

each curriculum level. The Senior Phase represents the sixth level of progression in CfE (Scottish Government, 2021^[19]). As part of the assessment framework, practitioners are expected to engage in moderation, a collaborative mechanism through which teachers develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations. Moderation involves practitioner meetings throughout the year to discuss a range of assessment evidence that demonstrate learners' progress and achievement. It takes place at the school, local, regional and national levels.

Efforts to structure an approach to student assessment aligned with CfE's philosophy seem to have been carried out in primary schools. The OECD team finds causes for concern, however, in secondary schools and especially in the Senior Phase. At that stage, assessment practices appear to create considerable tensions and obstacles for realising the intentions of CfE. Findings from research also present a complex picture, concluding that the large number of assessment benchmarks to specify the Experiences and Outcomes has resulted in over-specified programmes, fragmented instructional tick-box approaches and more bureaucratic than coherent, curriculum planning (Hayward, 2018^[26]; Priestley and Minty, 2013^[41]).

Assessment is an issue of major concern and stress at the secondary level, for almost everybody, from students and their parents, to teachers, administrators, media, and politicians (both in Parliament and Government). Overall, the OECD team perceived a focus on achievement labels, levels and scores in Scotland, which is common in secondary education in many countries. There does not appear to yet be successful alignment of qualifications and exams in the Senior Phase with the CfE vision, which is not only challenging for the Senior Phase itself but is causing a backwash into the later stages of BGE (Scottish Parliament - Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]). It is also hampering the full enactment of the CfE ideals in those stages and creating a gap in student learning and progression as students move through the curriculum. From the issues raised throughout the OECD visit and the literature, it seems that the education system spends a disproportionate amount of time and energy on technical issues around student assessments and (high stakes) examinations, while there are doubts about the relevance and validity of their goals and content.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to explore different alternatives to student assessments, which can be considered in the future in relation to this gap. This is not a unique feature of Scottish education but a persistent problem in many OECD countries that many are aiming to tackle. Portugal, for example, passed a law delegating curriculum autonomy and flexibility to schools, intentionally promoting formative assessment, so as to avoid curriculum narrowing and to encourage teachers to explore new types of assessments (OECD, 2018^[42]).

Overall implementation of Curriculum for Excellence

Scottish schools at both primary and secondary levels have developed and implemented their curriculum using the CfE framework. The OECD team emphasises that not each of the curriculum components reviewed have to be specified at all levels (nation, school, classroom), on the contrary. In principle, it is advisable that at the system level, the emphasis is on formulating general directions for why and what matters in order to inspire and guide further decision making. Vision formulation, common goal statements and joint assessment approaches can outline the general course of action since it is often difficult enough to arrive at a reasonable and workable consensus in those areas. Further interpretation and elaboration for all components are better left to local and school levels, where specific choices can be made that fit the local characteristics and preferences.

BGE is envisaged to cover the period from S1 to S3 to ensure that young people acquire a breadth of experience across eight curricular areas. The Senior Phase is envisaged as a three-year experience in which young people are encouraged to remain at school for longer and engage in deeper learning with a broader range of opportunities to develop skills that are relevant to the wider world. Several inquiries about the implementation of CfE in secondary schools observed that many schools attempted to implement the

new curriculum model of three years of BGE followed by three years of Senior Phase (referred to as the “3+3” model in Scotland) within the unchanged structure of the previous curriculum model divided into two-year periods (“2+2+2”). This resulted in unintended consequences, including the blurring of S3’s purpose. S3 is at times used to start preparing students for the qualifications courses expected of them in the Senior Phase, effectively shortening the time allocated to their broad general education due to the narrowing effect of National Courses on learning in the Senior Phase. Some stakeholders viewed S3 as a “waste of time” and considered it better for this level to start preparing for Senior Phase qualifications (Scottish Parliament - Education and Skills Committee, 2019^[9]).

This lack of alignment contrasts with earlier policy rhetoric about the Senior Phase, which expected the CfE values, purposes and principles to underpin all National Courses. Schools are expected to provide learners with opportunities to acquire and develop the four capacities, as well as skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work. CfE is meant to be a pedagogical approach to provide learners with a rich education, to develop the knowledge, values and skills that make them resilient in a fast-paced, global society and economy.

National Courses aim to qualify a learner’s achievement against a defined standard, providing learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding in a formal way. The broad objectives of National Courses are to provide high standards, and breadth and depth of learning that will help learners progress to further study, training and employment. The reality of the Senior Phase seems, however, to deviate from the espoused policy intentions of the new National Courses.

The new National Courses were designed to form a qualifications system that:

- supports the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence, and supports the learning of the new curriculum, including its breadth
- provides a seamless transition from Outcomes and Experiences, with increased emphasis on skills
- is inclusive, coherent and easy to understand for pupils, parents, staff, employers and other users
- meets the needs of all learners in progressing from prior levels of achievement and provides opportunities for learners to develop at different rates, at different times, in different areas across the curriculum
- provides clear and smooth progression and articulation between different levels of qualifications, to Higher and Advanced Higher, and onto post-school learning and employment
- involves an overall approach to assessment that reduces the time learners spend on assessment for certification and allows more time for learning, and more focus on skills and integration with other aspects of learning
- results in an assessment that supports, motivates and challenges learners, with more scope for personalisation and choice
- maintains high standards, credibility and relevance.

Practice in the Senior Phase seems to be different than expected. A gap between the intended curriculum (in formal policy) and the implemented curriculum in (school and classroom) practices seems to have its roots in the stage of initial curriculum design, where efforts to translate the visionary ideals into qualifications (and related course documents and assessment tools) have not fully succeeded, compromising many initial ideals. Many policy intentions at the introduction of the new qualifications (McAra, Broadley and McLauchlan, 2013^[43]) do not seem to have been fulfilled yet. It was one of the major concerns raised during the national debate on education in 2002 (which led to the CfE initiative) that the secondary curriculum focused too strongly on exams.

The OECD team’s general conclusion is that the coherence between the various curriculum components as well as the consistency between the policy intentions at large and the implemented curriculum in local contexts is better for learners aged 3 to 15 years, especially in primary schools, than for learners aged

15 to 18, except for students who are preparing for Advanced Higher qualifications, which seem to continue teaching and learning practices in line with the CfE vision.

BGE curricula in both primary and secondary schools could still benefit from a clearer definition of the role of knowledge in learning and competency development, as it would enhance the transition into the Senior Phase. The Senior Phase, and especially the Higher courses, do not appear to be fully aligned with CfE intentions in aims, content, pedagogy and assessment. Choices should be made in relation to what is best for students to be prepared for their future. At present, as the current student assessments in the Senior Phase are the only way to externally assess what students are learning, these are the incentives that lead the focus of the Senior Phase.

The following questions come to mind:

- How could the structure of the Senior Phase be aligned with CfE?
- How should learning and teaching be organised?
- What does breadth of learning really involve?
 - The number of subjects only?
 - Interdisciplinary learning?
 - Something else?
 - Or something more?
- And how can breadth be articulated with depth of learning?
- How much should be obligatory and how much room is available for personal choice?

The OECD team feels a balanced discussion with active input from stakeholders with different perspectives and interests would be highly useful. It is necessary, first, for the productivity of such a debate to reach more clarity on what the Scottish system means by the key terminology of “knowledge”, “skills”, “attitudes”, “attributes”, “capacities”, “capabilities”, “competences”, “dispositions” and the like. Although it is a matter of deliberations within the Scottish context, support from curriculum design scholars would help align those definitions with the concepts from the literature. Some inspiration about options could be offered by international trends and promising examples [see, for example, O'Donnell (2018_[32]), for a comparative study]. The current COVID-19 situation can be a good opportunity to engage in this discussion.

When one compares the intended, implemented and attained curriculum, many good practices emerge. The original policy intention of CfE was to provide a future-oriented curriculum with a clear vision that gives more autonomy, space and flexibility for schools to adapt and enact it. The OECD team has heard testimony of this approach, building on a high-quality teaching workforce, pedagogical leadership and availability of support approaches and materials for schools and their professionals. Although the actual task of curriculum design still appears to be challenging for all schools across Scotland, a variable but gradually growing capacity is observed. It is important to realise that it takes long-term investments and time for such processes to become successful and institutionalised. That lesson can be learnt from, for example, the four decades that it took education in Finland to build up such bottom-up curricular capacity in communities and schools, with lots of patience, stamina and ongoing support (Halinen and Holappa, 2013_[44]; Halinen, 2018_[45]). However, it is encouraging to see that there appear to be many strong school leaders able to lead their schools to develop and build on the strengths of CfE for their students. The new initiative to lead more “from the middle” (OECD, 2015_[20]), resulting in the establishment of six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), might support such curricular capacity building. Thus far, the experienced support by these RICs seems more limited than hoped for.

While there are good intentions and practices across the system, the implementation of CfE shows a large variety of practices between schools and classrooms. This leads to questions about whether the intended autonomy and flexible practices of schools are threatening the aspirations for equity in students' experiences and outcomes. Thus far, the attainment gap appears to have decreased somewhat over the

last decade (Scottish Government, 2019^[46]). However, there are tensions between the variety of learner experiences made possible by schools' curricular freedom and a wider range of qualifications by the SQA and other actors, on the one hand, and the perceptions of stakeholders and the wider public of what "success" and "excellence" mean, beyond obtaining a set of national qualifications, on the other. Further efforts are needed to ensure that the variety of instructional practices, assessment and qualifications offered are of high quality so that CfE contributes to closing the gap. However, this is not up to schools alone. Wider public, socio-economic investments and support seem indispensable in domains such as housing, health, and jobs.

Beyond CfE implementation, looking at impact, the OECD team noted positive impressions of the attained curriculum (in terms of learner experiences and results), as mentioned by many who were interviewed and confirmed by the team's observations during conversations with students. Learners seem confident, communicative, engaged, analytical, and they are quite keen to make (more) choices themselves. Many interviewees expressed that Scottish students today are much more well rounded in their development and that they exhibit more curious behaviour and a stronger entrepreneurial attitude than in previous decades. These are positive outcomes.

However, there is a shortage of valid and reliable evaluation data on such student outcomes at the system level. Using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on the achievements of 15-year-old students in a few subjects as indicators of CfE impact on learners provides a limited reflection of the CfE intentions. Moreover, superficial interpretation of (limited) data on student achievement (as is often done in media) usually results in more confusion and frustration than clarity. As one of the interviewed researchers expressed, "Scotland collects large amounts of data, but they are often not exactly adapted to their subsequent use, or they lack rigorous definition and evaluation" (OECD, 2020^[11]). Collecting data is not the same as conducting high-quality research, which contributes to understanding and to offering meaningful feedback and feedforward to the system.

Referring to the potential added value of educational research to curriculum development, there appears to be a relative shortage of design-based curriculum research in Scotland. Most published research is of a descriptive, analytical, conceptual or critical nature. That may be relevant in various ways, but there are a few examples, with the exception of Drew, Priestley and Michael (2016^[47]), of collaborative efforts of researchers and teachers to systematically address practical curricular problems in such a way that it contributes to improving curriculum design and implementation, to the professional development of the participants involved and of knowledge growth about those challenges (Mintrop, 2016^[48]; Pieters, Voogt and Pareja Roblin, 2019^[49]; van den Akker and Nieveen, forthcoming^[50]). Thus, the OECD team endorses the International Council of Education Advisers' recent call for more and stronger research-practice partnerships and design-based research, which can occur through various modalities, such as Lesson Study, Teacher Design Teams and Professional Learning Communities. Commonalities among these modalities include starting with analysing practitioners' real-life, context-specific problems; systematic exploration; design and experimentation (usually with iterative approaches); and long-term interaction between practitioners and researchers.

About the amount and quality of resources, teachers – the main actors in daily curriculum design – expressed, perhaps surprisingly, few explicit complaints. Even facilities and time for professional development seemed more or less acceptable, although the politeness of the teachers interviewed perhaps prevented them from expressing strong criticism. Other observers (outside schools) expressed that they thought teachers would need more time for professional learning, for example, by spending less time on classroom teaching and having more time available for professional learning. In particular, collaborative teamwork on school-wide curriculum arrangements and on strengthening pedagogical classroom repertoire was recommended.

The OECD team's impression is that there is some variation across the system in intensity and modes of teacher professional development. There also appears to be some variation in teachers' support from their school contexts, local authorities and the RICs (where applicable).

Conclusion

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence was a bold initiative from its inception that has progressed and reached schools across Scotland. Its main vision and objectives are still relevant today. It remains valid for its bold, aspirational, future-oriented approach and continues to be an inspiring international example, with its four capacities focused on holistic student learning, which combines knowledge, skills and attitudes for the future. It has served as an example to many countries, and its key message strongly resembles the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of the OECD. CfE allows for reasonable coherence and seems to have been consolidated in Broad General Education for learners aged 3 to 15 years. It has been implemented and adopted across schools up to this age, where the concepts of CfE, the pedagogical approaches, the learning and assessments appear to be well consolidated.

Following two decades since its inception, Scotland should consider renewing its commitment to CfE's bold and relevant vision. A key challenge facing CfE is how to create more coherence and alignment between the curricular vision and goals for learning, a suitable pedagogy and adequate assessment approaches, especially in light of COVID-19, for student learning and progression across their school years. CfE has worthwhile ideals, and its implementation has been accomplished in primary and lower-secondary. The coherence of CfE enactment is less consistent, however, in the Senior Phase (for learners aged 15 to 18 years), where fundamental challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment re-design. Without taking up the task of a re-visioning of CfE in the Senior Phase, the practices in upper-secondary education will keep lagging in its curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment) and will exercise a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education and the transition for students.

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3

Stakeholder engagement at the heart of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

In Scotland (United Kingdom), significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout the lifecycle of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Such efforts have contributed to its success. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE has created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. However, progress is required at the system level so stakeholders are fully empowered and engaged in the decision-making process. This chapter analyses the progress made and pending issues of engagement in stakeholder involvement, transparency of responsibilities and communication.

An overview of stakeholder engagement with Curriculum for Excellence

In curriculum policy, stakeholders are individuals (e.g. teachers, parents, school leaders, students and politicians), experts in subjects, pedagogy and curricular studies (scientific community), and collective entities (e.g. ministry of education, national agencies, local authorities, teacher unions) concerned with a curriculum. Their engagement refers to the processes via which they get involved, take responsibilities and interact throughout a curriculum's lifecycle, from design to implementation, in daily practice and during reviews.

In Scotland (United Kingdom), the ecosystem around Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) comprises numerous stakeholder groups, bodies and individuals, all very engaged by the curriculum policy's evolutions. The OECD team met with a significant number of CfE stakeholders, who provided their perspective on implementation and explained the way they engage with CfE and with other stakeholders around CfE. CfE stakeholders include practitioners, learners and their parents, national, regional and local government bodies, public agencies, professional unions and associations, and specialist organisations. Specific structures also developed around CfE, resulting in a number of governance committees, advisory bodies and other stakeholder consultation fora that further populate the ecosystem (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Overview of major Curriculum for Excellence stakeholders

	Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence
Stakeholders	
Scottish Government's Learning Directorate	Scottish Government department dedicated to the school system and wider learning environment. The Learning Directorate is responsible for promoting quality implementation of CfE; developing the teaching workforce and educational leadership; ensuring infrastructure and access to digital technology; and pursuing performance improvement, innovation and good practice in education overall.
Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee	Monitors education and education policy on behalf of the Scottish Parliament. The Committee investigates specific aspects of CfE and its implementation, provides recommendations and holds the Scottish Government accountable.
Education Scotland	Public agency under Scottish Government authority, responsible for quality assurance and improvement in education. Education Scotland's mandate includes overseeing the implementation and quality of curriculum and assessment; carrying out school evaluations as Scotland's Inspectorate; providing support for teachers and education, including continuous professional development; providing instructional and support materials for teachers in specific areas (such as emotional well-being and raising attainment for all); and conducting research. Education Scotland and predecessors have been key actors of CfE policy developments, monitoring and implementation support since 2009-10.
Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Statutory body for qualification awarding and regulation in Scotland. SQA's duties are to develop or accredit, validate, assure quality, award and inform on the attainment of a broad range of Scottish qualifications including "National 5", "Highers" and "Advanced Highers", and "National Progression Awards". SQA sits on key governance committees and working groups regarding CfE implementation. It was especially involved in the revision of national qualifications and provision of material in early CfE implementation.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership	Body managing the SCQF, which classifies and allows for comparing all qualifications available in Scotland into one framework. Awarding bodies such as the SQA use this information to develop course content and assessment. The SCQF Board of Directors includes representatives of College Development Network, Quality Assurance for Higher Education, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland and employers.
Local authorities (LAs)	Local level of government in Scotland. The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. They take part in CfE developments at the national level (e.g. the Curriculum and Assessment Board includes representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland [ADES]) and support implementation at the school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms (funding, discussion of subject selection and time allocation, provision of authority-wide CfE guidance, specific support at the school or cluster level). LAs also provide support via the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives.
Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)	Sub-national bodies established in 2017 to promote effective collaboration around educational improvement and equity across local authorities. The six RICs are responsible for promoting educational improvement initiatives (including in the form of school support and professional learning offers for teachers) and supporting collaboration across local authorities, and with schools, Education Scotland and other stakeholders.

	Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence
Teachers and school leaders ("headteachers")	Develop and use own school curriculum based on the CfE framework to support student learning. Most teachers develop their own materials to teach according to the school's curriculum (especially in Broad General Education [BGE]); prepare students for qualifications (in Senior Phase); assess and report on progress; and communicate with parents. School leaders support teachers; lead curriculum design; manage the school and its partnerships; translate policy into school practice. Teachers and school leaders usually collaborate with peers from other schools and with local, regional and national bodies to share practice and further develop CfE.
Teachers' and school leaders' unions	Represent the teaching profession's interests in education policy and professional negotiations and generally support the profession via training and other professional network activities. Union representatives sit on key governance committees and working groups to share their perspective with system leaders, agencies and other stakeholders. Major unions include School Leaders Scotland (SLS) and Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS), Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).
BOCSH group	Consortium of senior curriculum managers from half of the 32 local authorities working with national bodies to support curriculum leadership. BOCSH members provide exemplar materials to support local authorities, schools, curricular leaders and teachers engaged in implementing CfE, and highlight good practice in a whole-school approach to CfE in BGE and Senior Phase.
General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)	Independent professional body promoting and regulating the teaching profession in Scotland. GTCS maintains professional standards; sets the requirements and advises ministers for teacher training; supports new teachers during induction; assesses teachers' qualifications and experience; manages the professional register.
Students ("learners")	Participate in learning in school and other settings from age 3 to 18 years and beyond. CfE promotes active participation from learners in their learning and society in general.
Children and young people organisations	Defend children's rights and promote their citizen participation. Scotland's Children's Parliament supports children's participation and engagement, and works with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies to promote and protect children's rights. The Scottish Youth Parliament aims to represent the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people and their views of young people on societal issues.
Youth work agencies	Ensure every young person has access to quality youth work opportunities (e.g. Youth Link Scotland, Young Scot). Youth work is part of community learning and development (CLD), whose professionals help people of all ages with their professional orientation and development. National youth work agencies are partners in CfE implementation for diversification of Senior Phase pathways and positive post-school destinations, career education and other activities related to the "world of work".
Parents and parent organisations	Parents (and guardians) participate in students' education, are informed by schools and can take part in schools' parent councils. Organisations support parent engagement with their local schools (e.g. via parent councils) and represent parent interests in national policy making. The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFOS) represents parent councils across Scotland, with national and local government and other organisations. Connect supports parents' groups nationally to get involved in schools.
Higher education institutions (universities)	Nineteen institutions offer higher education in Scotland. University representatives sit on the Curriculum and Assessment Board; work with other key stakeholders to ensure CfE prepares learners for university and qualifications provide clear pathways to learners. Universities Scotland works for and represents the 19 institutions, and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education represents their School of Education.
Education researchers	Investigate various themes in education, including CfE. Researchers provide central insight for CfE developments, feed into the evidence base for educational and policy leadership and practices and contribute to informing and advising system leaders. They sit on key governance, advisory and working committees and participate in specific programmes contributing to CfE developments.
Further education institutions (colleges)	Twenty-six colleges offer further education in Scotland. College representatives and their organisations participate in CfE developments and implementation. For example, Colleges Scotland is part of the Curriculum Narrative Strategic Engagement Group (2018). Colleges Development Network sat on the CfE Management Board (2007-17) and provides colleges with trainings, events and specialist projects.
Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	Public arms-length body responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in colleges and universities. SFC is identified among the national partners for CfE implementation, including to fund teacher professionalisation aligned with CfE priorities, support Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (DYW) and other programmes to implement CfE priorities in relation with colleges, facilitate partnerships between schools, local authorities and colleges, and contribute to data collection in the college sector.
Employers	Work with colleges, schools and other stakeholders (e.g. Skills Development Scotland) to provide work-based experiences in line with CfE.
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)	Helps individuals manage their career and build employability skills from school onwards. SDS works with employers under ministerial guidance on a national, sectoral, regional, local and individual basis to recognise and articulate current and future skills needs, and to engage with the skills system to cater to those needs.

Role in education in relation to Curriculum for Excellence	
Governance committees, advisory bodies and fora for stakeholder consultation	
Scottish Education Council (SEC)	Main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017. The SEC provides strategic advice to ministers on education improvement and aims to lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the Curriculum and Assessment Board and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers.
Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB)	Main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017. The CAB oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education; considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all; supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups. It is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, and members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, SDS, and CLD representatives.
International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA)	Established in 2016 to advise the First and Deputy First Ministers on how best to achieve excellence and equity in the Scottish education system based on international best practice. ICEA members are education experts from Scotland and worldwide.
Education Leaders Forum	Established in 2018 to capture the views of a wide stakeholder group on the development of the education system. It is chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and has input from young people, teachers' professional associations, scholars, parent associations, SDS, and CLD representatives.
Teacher Panel	Established in 2016 to provide views on de-cluttering, workload and bureaucracy in order to enhance the effectiveness of the interaction between pupil and teacher.
Strategic Board for Teacher Education	National forum for discussion between key education stakeholders on teaching standards and teacher education. The Board oversees and evaluates reforms to teacher education from the perspective of the <i>Teaching Scotland's Future</i> report (2011).
Scottish Learner Panel	Comprised of 30 children and young people from nine school settings from across Scotland. The panel deliver their views on education policy to the Scottish Government. The panel met on five occasions in 2018-19 and published a final report.
Commission for Widening Access to University	Gathers Scottish Government officials and stakeholders to tackle socio-economic inequality in higher education by leading the implementation of recommendations contained in the final report of the Commission on Widening Access.

Source: The roles summarised here are based on official documentation and stakeholders' views collected during OECD interviews (OECD, 2020^[1]).

Stakeholder engagement, and more specifically, involvement, communication and transparency matter in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence for several reasons.

First, in Scotland, as around the world, education systems are now characterised by multi-level governance, with multiple actors operating at different levels, whose links to each other are to a certain extent fluid and open to negotiation. Attention to stakeholder engagement in education policy implementation has increased as a result of three trends: a greater awareness of the importance of education quality for a country's future; new technologies allowing citizens to be more vocal about policy matters outside of traditional engagement mechanisms; and high degrees of citizen participation as a result (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[2]). In addition, governance arrangements have become more complex and decentralised, with greater engagement in policy and implementation processes across different levels of education systems (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[3]). Against this backdrop, different stakeholders are more likely to exert their agency, either to support or oppose curriculum changes, and influence the organisations or communities they are embedded in (Lemke and Harris-Wai, 2015^[4]).

Second, collaboration, consensus, co-design, partnership and empowerment are central to the rhetoric around CfE and education in Scotland. They are also important to implement if curriculum processes are to respect CfE principles. In particular, school-based curriculum design requires meaningful engagement to develop shared meaning and ownership of CfE concepts and empower key curriculum actors. Such meaningful forms of engagement imply trust and allow for collaboration and practice sharing between stakeholders; clarity on whose responsibility it is to provide school support and professional learning; and clear two-way communication about policy evolution, priorities and difficulties at local and national levels.

Finally, ongoing needs for adjustment throughout the CfE lifecycle also require shared meaning, deep involvement of stakeholders, trust and effective decision making for effective change. In a system seeking collaborative leadership and empowerment, decision making is not top-down but consists of inclusive and fruitful discussions between stakeholders who know and have the resources to assume their responsibilities, which results in effective and trustworthy decisions.

Significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle (2004-present), which contributed to some successes with CfE and shall be explained. However, issues related to stakeholder engagement remain that complicate CfE implementation, and at times even hinder it. The following sections analyse the progress made and pending issues of engagement in terms of stakeholder involvement, transparency of responsibilities and communication.

From inclusive involvement to collective ownership of Curriculum for Excellence

Involvement refers to the opportunity stakeholders have to influence and shape the policy, whether it is through its design or implementation. It is determined on the one hand by government-created channels to encourage stakeholder participation, and on the other hand, by stakeholders' willingness and capacity to take part in the process. Stakeholders can get involved in many different ways, such as through public or internal consultations, boards, councils and committees, union dialogues, networks, surveys, research projects and publications (OECD, 2020^[5]). Key stakeholder involvement in education policy development and implementation can help cultivate a sense of joint ownership over policies and hence build more effective and relevant reforms (Finlay, 1998^[6]).

The process preceding and developing CfE aimed to engage stakeholders widely and in a more involved way than previously in Scotland. In the past, the national curriculum was essentially developed following approaches from the top down, providing central guidelines and using cascade models of staff development to help schools implement those guidelines. In comparison, the approach to CfE development aimed to engage practitioners from the beginning, involving them in thinking about the educational aims, values and classroom practice. The engagement consisted in work about various components of CfE carried out in collaboration between the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education with involvement by local authorities, schools, colleges, professional associations and scholars (Scottish Government, 2006^[7]).

Consultation and collaboration are at the core of CfE processes, as much in policy design as in curriculum delivery. As a result, stakeholders get involved frequently and intensely with CfE, which, as acknowledged to the OECD team by system leaders, top advisory groups and practitioners, marks remarkable progress from a time when there was admittedly a lack of engagement and support across the system (OECD interviews). An extensive range of options for stakeholders' involvement with CfE exist, both at the initiative of system leaders and other stakeholders themselves. This tendency emerged from the beginning of CfE, through its development, and continues to characterise the stakeholder ecosystem (Scottish Government, 2008^[8]; 2021^[9]). Stakeholders have been involved in the design of CfE and are still involved in its daily implementation and ongoing evolution via:

- participation in governance committees, such as the Curriculum and Assessment Board, formerly CfE Management Board
- feedback provision through advisory and consultation entities, such as the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA), Learner Panel
- expression of organised interests through platforms and representative bodies, such as teacher unions, children and youth organisations, parent organisations

- discussion between professionals and education leaders at various levels, including in ADES, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), BOCOSH group and initiatives of practice sharing between schools
- decisions made by school communities as part of the ongoing process of curriculum design
- submissions to Parliamentary enquiries, for instance via the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Skills
- research projects and publications around CfE.

The high degree of stakeholder involvement contributed to wide support for CfE as a direction of travel for Scottish education, which matters greatly considering this vision fits both Scottish ambitions and what the international community understands as essential for learners in the 21st century. Both the stakeholders met and the documentation reviewed by the OECD team show broad support for a curriculum policy that helps students develop into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (the “four capacities”); and that enables school communities to design their curriculum and teachers to teach in the way they see best fit their students’ needs (Priestley, 2018^[10]; Priestley and Minty, 2013^[11]). A clear signal of the width of this support is that critiques of CfE tend to highlight the way the policy is implemented as the main issue, especially in secondary education, rather than the vision it pursues. The counter-proposals to CfE that the OECD team could observe consist more of going back to CfE’s vision and basic principles and assessing whether current practices realise them, than questioning the basic principles altogether (Humes, 2020^[12]; Commission on School Reform, 2020^[13]; Biesta G, 2015^[14]; OECD, 2020^[1]).

The many ways to get involved with CfE aim to offer various kinds of stakeholder participation, from information and consultation to collaboration and empowerment. CfE is described by policy makers as being co-designed and delivered collaboratively and by consensus through joint planning, implementation and monitoring between local and national partners (Scottish Government, 2021^[9]). Stakeholders appreciate the constant efforts made by system leaders to engage with them and welcomed the many opportunities they have to communicate their perspectives on CfE. Referring to the development of CfE, several practitioners and local officials acknowledged that the policy had been “developed from the ground up”, with national authorities guiding the process and practitioners getting involved in developing and testing the learning areas (OECD, 2020^[1]). Extensive evidence highlights that consensus between stakeholders is an important factor for the successful implementation of policy reforms (Corrales, 1999^[15]; Connell and Klem, 2012^[16]; Viennet and Pont, 2017^[3]). Enabling this consensus to extend to a sense of shared values and shared mission can improve educational outcomes (OECD, 2018^[17]).

Like Scotland, other education systems established the principle of local design, which implies that schools and their community design their own school curriculum within the new national framework. This principle enshrines stakeholders’ engagement throughout the policy lifecycle. Local curriculum design suggests that schools should engage with students, parents, local actors and other schools, both when they change and implement their curriculum. In New Zealand, for instance, the Ministry of Education emphasises seeking inputs from students, parents and local actors as a high-impact practice for local curriculum design. As a result, educators are expected to work together with parents and the community to design a curriculum relevant to their local context (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019^[18]).

With more than a decade of implementation, CfE shows that continuous and proactive involvement by stakeholders is central to the policy’s functioning. CfE implied significant shifts in the way education is delivered in Scotland, including greater professional agency and progressive empowerment of schools (see Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the policy environment).

“Empowerment” is, to some extent, the ultimate form of stakeholder engagement and adequate to core aspects of CfE, such as school-based curriculum design. Stakeholders appreciated the efforts made by national authorities to help empower schools and the profession. Initiatives of enquiry-based, continuous professional development (CPD, also referred to as “professional learning”) and professional collaboration

were especially highlighted as having a beneficial impact on teachers' deep understanding of CfE and self-efficacy in curriculum design. Scholars interviewed by the OECD team described, for instance, that enquiry into teachers' own practice seemed to empower them to exert their professional agency and to embed it into practice, although these developments still needed to be consolidated to be fully embedded in daily curriculum design practices (Priestley and Drew, 2019^[19]; Drew, Priestley and Michael, 2016^[20]; OECD, 2020^[11]).

CfE requires collaboration between stakeholders, both as part of governance and daily implementation of schools' curricula, given the diversity of knowledge, skills and values students are expected to gain to develop the four capacities. School practitioners and local actors consistently reported to the OECD team that the best curriculum experiences for students were provided where there was communication and collaboration within the school (between teachers, school leadership and students) and with school partners.

A central characteristic of CfE is its attempt to offer and promote diversified pathways to fit what learners want and need to study. In this, collaboration and partnerships between schools and their partners were especially highlighted as a key factor of success. The OECD team met, for instance, with practitioners and learners from two high schools who entered a formal partnership that significantly widened the courses on offer for students of the smaller school while creating systematic professional exchanges that benefitted both schools. Other ways to offer diverse learning to students included schools' partnerships with colleges and universities (for additional subjects and qualifications); with Skills Development Scotland (for career education); and with local charities and firms (for work-based experiences, including apprenticeships). CfE is seen by schools and some actors from higher and further education as an underpinning factor to make the tertiary sector more coherent (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Multi-stakeholder partnership to diversify learner pathways

Learning outside schools, in the community

Partnership is central to the everyday implementation of schools' curricula within the CfE framework, including to fulfil CfE's aim to diversify the possible pathways learners can shape and take to fit their ambitions. One of the many possibilities offered with CfE curricula is for learners who do not feel at ease in a very academic setting, to design a flexible learning setting that fits their needs and preferences while keeping them interested in learning. The OECD team met with representatives from the CLD sector, one of schools' many possible partners for diversifying learning experiences. According to CLD actors, the quality of outcomes and experiences for learners depended largely on whether there were strong partnerships between schools, CLD actors and third-sector providers (e.g. football clubs). These partnerships allow for designing a personalised curriculum, starting where the young person is and what his or her needs are. A customised curriculum can be delivered in a combination of the school setting, a college and/or a community setting. Some of the curricula initially developed for one young person can be scaled up into a larger pathway, e.g. partnership programmes, homeschool learning partnerships using Pupil Equity Funding, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), summer/Easter programmes.

... and at other education levels

Another possible type of partnership for schools to diversify their learners' experience is with colleges and universities. Both colleges and universities help widen the perspectives of students in upper-secondary education and provide special programmes (in universities) and early courses (in colleges) to help school students adapt their learning styles. Where partnerships are strong, schools plan to leave time for school students to engage with college courses and beyond, becoming part of the college communities.

Note: Stakeholder interviews performed by the OECD team for the assessment.

Beyond a great degree of involvement and collaboration, CfE's philosophy required that stakeholders, and especially teachers and school leaders, take ownership of the curriculum policy, a central factor for its successful implementation (Mikser, Kärner and Krull, 2016^[21]).

Curriculum ownership implies two things for stakeholders, according to Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2003^[22]). First, it provides individuals with a sense of satisfaction related to psychological comfort and security, a conducive condition for stakeholders to support and carry out a new curriculum. Second, ownership is accompanied by the willingness to assume responsibilities, risks, and sacrifices. Experienced responsibilities motivate stakeholders to invest time and energy to advance the cause of curriculum reform.

In order to capture stakeholders' perspectives on these two aspects of ownership, the OECD team asked the question, "Who owns CfE?" during interviews. Responses consistently pointed in a similar direction: all key stakeholders felt they shared ownership of CfE to some degree. They all agreed that this sense of ownership should be felt first by teachers, school leaders and learners, which was the case in an increasing number of schools. However, stakeholders also consistently pointed out that this sense of collective ownership, although in line with CfE's philosophy, was misaligned with the actual distribution of responsibilities, trust and influence in decision making (OECD, 2020^[11]). This possible misalignment will be investigated further in the following section.

CfE largely shifted the locus of curriculum design into schools, which calls for stakeholder involvement to go beyond consultation towards collaborative decision making. The literature on stakeholder engagement and participation in public decision making classifies several stakeholder involvement mechanisms that have different purposes and various degrees of intensity (Arnstein, 1969^[23]; Pretty, 1995^[24]; White, 1996^[25]). The classifications vary around the following, by order of intensity (International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), 2014^[26]):

- information
- consultation
- involvement
- collaboration
- empowerment.

Most Scottish stakeholders take available opportunities to communicate their views (through consultation and involvement in working groups and governance committees), yet there seems to be a limited impact of these views on effective enhancements to CfE implementation. Stakeholders from several groups reported to the OECD team a general feeling that their involvement and collaboration in decision-making processes was rather informative and removed from the actual decisions made (OECD, 2020^[11]). For a system that engages quite systematically with stakeholders, it is impossible to satisfy all views on every issue: some decisions must be taken, and compromises reached. Yet, when seeking consensual and collaborative decision making and delivery in a system, trust between system leaders and other stakeholders is essential. Although some of the stakeholders interviewed were already involved in

governance committees and thus close to decision making, they did not necessarily trust that their participation had real weight on decision making. Trust is built through repeated interaction in which actors show trustworthy behaviour (Cerna, 2014^[27]). System leaders (whether at the national, regional or local level) need to, therefore, nurture this trust so stakeholder engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation.

Two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and consistency in terms of using stakeholders' input. According to the stakeholders interviewed and observations by the OECD team, the purpose of engagement initiatives around CfE is not always clear nor consistent. Clarifying the purpose of engagement initiatives helps adjust stakeholders' expectations of the impact of their contribution. In a consultation, stakeholders may expect their input to feed into the reflection prior to a decision but not determine it. As part of a governance committee or group intended to participate in decision making, stakeholders may expect their input to weigh equally with their counterparts'. Empowerment is a process that requires trust between decision makers and stakeholders: it takes time to take root, as well as resources and support, as the stakeholders empower themselves and develop the necessary capabilities, expertise and self-confidence to fulfil their mission.

The Scottish Empowerment Agenda, aligned to support the teaching profession's role in CfE, had clear effects on school leadership empowerment. The OECD team noted several elements of this empowerment through its interviews, including headteachers' leadership practices in schools' curriculum design and implementation processes, and how they felt they were able to interpret and prioritise policies that cater best to the needs of their staff and students (OECD, 2020^[1]). Policy progress made to advance the Empowerment Agenda include publishing a draft Headteachers' Charter; further developing the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs); elaborating revised Devolved School Management Guidelines; proposing new career pathways for teachers; and concluding an enhanced pay agreement for teachers, all of which in pursuit of reinforcing commitment (Scottish Government, 2021^[9]; Education Scotland, 2021^[28]).

Additional initiatives aim to support teacher empowerment and agency, including with curriculum design. The Scottish national professional learning model seeks to support teachers' agency through continuous professional development (such as the Teacher Leadership Programme) and professional standards. Further supported by RICs and local authorities, this support for agency translates into strong local examples of teacher empowerment and distributed leadership. For instance, the South Lanarkshire Council has encouraged its school leaders to empower their teachers to lead improvement work and developments. For many schools, this has meant making a teacher the "lead" on an element of the annual School Improvement Plan, of which priorities are decided on collegiately. For example, teachers have been leading the development of outdoor learning, a curriculum area or another aspect of school life such as community engagement. This engagement is intended to help empower teachers to lead training, communicate with parents and decide on next steps with regard to their lead role. Most schools will dedicate ring-fenced time to initiatives allowing teachers to plan and develop projects within their schools (Scottish Government, 2021^[9]).

The Empowerment Agenda does not yet seem to have allowed the same empowerment for teachers as for school leaders. This is possibly due to the fact that many of the initiatives are still recent policy endeavours. Several of the stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that system leaders' efforts to support the empowerment of school leaders and teachers are going in the right direction. However, the way the Empowerment Agenda is structured seems to prevent the very agency, both individual and collective, that that empowerment is about: according to the stakeholders interviewed, empowerment is handed to people (OECD, 2020^[1]).

Scottish stakeholders expect their input to be taken into account effectively and in agreement with the purpose given to the initiatives they participate in. Clarifying how decisions are reached and highlighting

how evidence has been considered help make decision-making processes transparent and comprehensible. Specific tools include publicly accessible documents and exchange formats that discuss decisions and how they were reached (Köster, Shewbridge and Krämer, 2020_[29]).

The Scottish education system made notable progress in creating space and time for a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to discussions about education policy, which suggest a transition from traditional approaches of direction from the centre to more openness and collaboration. However, these changes seem not to have granted equivalent degrees of influence to stakeholders most recently involved, as compared to that yielded by more traditional actors, including civil servants and officials at various levels of the system (Humes, 2020_[12]). Table 3.1 includes the range of governance committees related to CfE in which stakeholders have been engaged. The OECD team noted genuine commitment to open and transparent collaboration in its interviews, but stakeholders participating in various committees, boards or panels expressed concerns that their input had little impact on the advice provided and the decisions made in the end (OECD, 2020_[1]). On the one hand, this may be due to the influence of traditional actors on decision making, which has been in practice for a longer period of time than for other stakeholders. It may also be due to the challenges that arise from integrating different perspectives systematically and purposefully into policy making. This difficulty in integrating contributions systematically sends confusing messages to stakeholders within a system that seeks collaborative decision making. This concern was raised especially around the learners' perspective. The OECD team was repeatedly told that although a number of initiatives existed to get learners involved around CfE, both at school and the national level, stakeholders found that the outcomes were not taken into account enough within decisions.

"We have heard so many times what learners want... It is time for adults to act on what we already know."
(OECD, 2020_[1])

Making space for student voices and taking students' input into account is central in curriculum reform (Mitra, 2007_[30]; OECD, 2020_[31]). Successful examples of stakeholder involvement around curriculum issues nurture trust with stakeholders and build upon clarity of purpose and consistency. Box 3.2 highlights examples of two different but similarly promising processes of stakeholder involvement: Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) review of upper-secondary education and Wales' co-construction process of its new Curriculum for Wales.

Box 3.2. Stakeholder involvement around upper-secondary education in Ireland and Wales (United Kingdom)

Stakeholder involvement around upper-secondary education in Ireland

Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) initiated a comprehensive review of its upper-secondary education (Senior Cycle), which had not been revised in decades. The aim was to engage all key Senior Cycle stakeholders early in the policy process, to gather their perspective and to report to the Minister based on their contributions. More specifically, the review aimed to get a range of perspectives on the purpose, future, structure and functioning of Senior Cycle education.

The review was conceived around three phases. The first phase (2016/17) consisted of identifying topics to explore in relation to upper-secondary education, exploring the various approaches to conduct the Senior Cycle review as well as conducting a comparative study with other jurisdictions. The second phase (2018/19) involved two full cycles of reviews at both school (through school-based reviews) and national levels (through national seminars). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) served as a scientific adviser and contributed to analysing all the collected data throughout the process. Each cycle of the school-based reviews concluded with a series of national seminars.

The first series of seminars was built mainly on presenting the results from Cycle 1 school-based reviews. In response to participants' feedback on these first seminars, the NCCA re-designed the second series of seminars to shorten the presentation time and allow more time for discussions among the participating stakeholders. At the end of each seminar series, the NCCA published a bulletin with the results and sent this to schools and stakeholders. In addition, all materials produced in this review, and discussions, are published online for the general public to consult.

The third phase (2019) consisted of a round of public debate and discussions around a consultation document produced by the NCCA from the information collected in the first and second phases. An advisory report will be prepared once the third phase of the review is completed, which will be presented to the Department for Education and Skills to inform its decision about whether and how to change the Senior Cycle curriculum.

Co-construction of curriculum policy in Wales (United Kingdom)

As it started reforming its curriculum policy, Wales (United Kingdom) also initiated an altogether new approach to education policy making in its system. Co-construction consists of continuous collaboration with stakeholders from across the education system in policy making. The curriculum policy in Wales has been co-constructed from the early stages of conception, effectively developing the curriculum based on the conjunction of practitioners' knowledge, Pioneer schools' experience and experts' input. The widespread and systematic use of co-construction in Wales is commendable.

Three key mechanisms have supported co-construction throughout the policy process: the Pioneer Schools Network, working groups and consultations. While policy co-construction requires a significant investment in time and effort in the short term, it also encourages stakeholders to collaborate, trust each other, and own and support reforms in the longer term. As the planner and co-ordinator of education policy committed to co-construction, the Welsh Government has to maintain a challenging equilibrium between providing the necessary guidance for all other stakeholders to act in a co-ordinated manner and leaving enough space for them to take ownership of the new curriculum.

Source: OECD (2020^[32]) *Education in Ireland*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/636bc6c1-en>. OECD (2020^[33]) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4b483953-en>.

The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE creates both the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision and a risk of confusion if stakeholders have little transparency on where their responsibilities lie compared to the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders.

Responsibilities for more transparent engagement with Curriculum for Excellence

Transparency of responsibilities refers to a set of measures that enable multiple stakeholders involved in the policy implementation process to know what everyone's role is and to be able to track their own and others' progress throughout the implementation period. A transparent process fosters trust among stakeholders, is collective, and involves stakeholders in defining their roles and monitoring their performance. Transparency of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms is essential for effective decision making and for stakeholders to find the self-confidence and support to implement CfE, especially within complex governance of the existing system. Ambiguous or overlapping responsibilities and roles can lead to confusion, and considerable effort may be needed to overcome initial misunderstandings and associated anxiety. The question of which actors at which levels should be accountable for which outcomes and how to resolve potential accountability tensions is a challenge for many education systems (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[2]).

Curriculum for Excellence establishes that governance of, and accountability for, the curriculum in Scottish schools is a shared responsibility between the Scottish Government's Directorates, national bodies, including SQA and Education Scotland, local government and schools. The Scottish Government sets the national policy context and is accountable for system performance. Advisory boards and committees such as the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) and the International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA) feed advice into the Scottish Government's decision-making process. Education Scotland and SQA support implementation and ensure the quality of the curriculum and qualifications, respectively. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality at the local level and are accountable locally for the nature and quality of delivery and outcomes (Scottish Government, 2021^[9]).

School leaders (referred to as "headteachers" in Scotland) are responsible for ensuring a curriculum that meets the needs of children and young people in their schools. As per Scotland's Empowerment Agenda and the Education Reform Joint Agreement, school leaders are the leaders of learning and teaching in their schools, "senior officers of the local authority and have operational responsibility for the service they provide, therefore the majority of decisions should be made at school level". As such, school leaders are invested with wide responsibility for leading the curriculum design process of their school in line with CfE, and working collaboratively with the local authority, partners, teachers, learners and their parents, and other schools on curriculum design and school improvement (Scottish Government, 2018^[34]).

Sharing responsibility for CfE with schools, teachers and learners as central owners aligns with CfE principles. As the OECD team observed, stakeholders generally agree that CfE relies on collective responsibility. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities (including local authorities, RICs, professional networks and unions, national bodies and the Scottish Government) to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework, through curriculum delivery and policy changes. Admittedly, the Scottish Government and its Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills retain political responsibility for the progress of CfE as a major education policy (OECD, 2020^[11]). This commitment to shared responsibility signals progress towards a form of "leadership from the middle" that a former OECD review called for in Scotland. Leadership from the middle is characterised by different organisations taking responsibility to drive educational improvements on behalf of the system and therefore relies on transparency of responsibilities (OECD, 2015^[35]).

Education systems find various ways to distribute responsibility around curriculum policy and implementation. With CfE shifting curriculum design to schools and teachers, and willing to evolve toward a more trust-based system of accountability, the example of Finland may be of interest (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Trust-based transparency in Finland

Finland has consistently ranked among the top-performing education systems since the beginning of the 21st century. Among the factors of its success, Finland's culture of trust, co-operation and responsibility underpin the system's high performance. The National Board develops its strategic guidelines on educational funding, legislation, evaluation, and curriculum content based on educational research and through consultation and discussion. As such, the central authority steers but does not prescribe in detail the national curriculum. Instead, trusted teams of highly qualified teachers effectively write most of the curriculum together at the local level to adjust to their students within the national framework.

Trust in the profession and in school leaders owes, on the one hand, to their high qualifications, expertise and widespread commitment and responsibility. On the other hand, trust is actively built through deliberate structures and initiatives. These structures combine horizontal and vertical teamwork, networking, participation, target setting and self-evaluation. Interventions from the top are

most often replaced by co-operative problem solving, and relationships with hierarchies are appeased.

Instead of top-down external interventions that concentrate on issues such as closing achievement gaps or raising performance, high performance and equity levels are a consequence of dynamic learning systems where highly qualified and responsible professionals produce these results for themselves.

These relationships of responsibility, co-operation and trust allow Finland's systemic leadership to follow common strategic orientations while responding to local specificities.

Source: Hargreaves, A. and D. Fink (2008^[36]), "Distributed leadership: democracy or delivery?", <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810863280>.

Divisions of responsibility between central government, local governing authorities and schools in policy making, is an ongoing question for education systems. In a recent survey about education policy priorities, OECD countries highlighted the need to clarify responsibilities as a pressing issue. Responsibilities broadly included decision making about teacher recruitment, salary increases, school budgets and curricular content (OECD, 2016^[37]). As shown in Figure 3.1, between 2008 and 2019, this policy priority was identified in at least 32 education systems, either by the OECD in previous country-based work (26 education systems), by participating education systems (20 education systems), or both (14 education systems). Clarifying this division was considered a priority in three UK systems, including England, Scotland and Wales (OECD, 2019^[38]).

The stakeholders interviewed noted that a shared responsibility of CfE has yet to be reached at the system level. To the OECD team's question, "Who owns CfE?" stakeholders signalled their sense of shared ownership and highlighted its misalignment with the distribution of responsibilities. CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with only some schools having complete ownership while others lacked confidence and empowerment. The general perspective was that too many stakeholders claimed ownership of CfE, on the one hand, and that the actual responsibilities that come with such ownership were unclear, on the other.

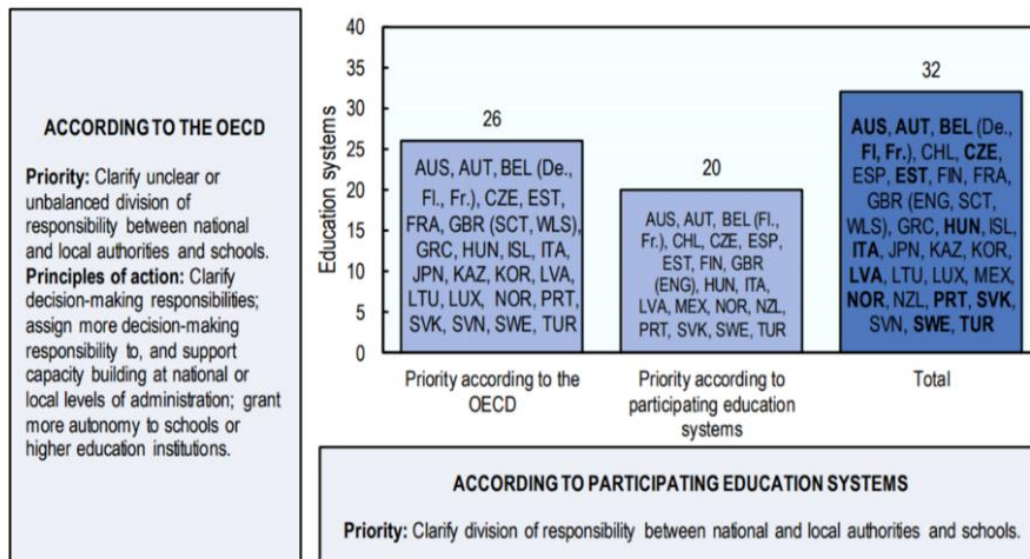
"At the beginning, it seemed like everybody wanted to produce their own perception of what CfE was, how it should be delivered, instead of having one. There were too many chiefs and not enough Indians."

"It has to be a collaborative ownership, but at the moment, there is too much political ownership, which is disturbing."

"We never managed whole ownership of the CfE system completely, partly because we never got the metrics right for CfE success." (OECD, 2020^[11])

Figure 3.1. Clarifying the division of responsibility between the levels of an education system, 2019

Number of participating education systems in which the division of responsibility is considered a priority according to either the OECD or participating education systems.



Notes: For priority “according to the OECD”, see OECD (2019^[38]), Annex A (OECD publications consulted) and Reader’s Guide (years covered). “Principles of action” refers to a component of a recommendation that draws from international evidence produced on a specific topic, either by the OECD or externally. Priority “according to participating education systems” is based on responses to *Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Surveys* 2013 and 2016-17, although responses for Austria, Belgium (Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities), Italy, Kazakhstan, Spain and Sweden are based on the *Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Country Profiles* published during 2017 and 2018. Responses given during the validation processes for all education systems in 2019 are also included (see the Reader’s Guide). Regarding comparing previous OECD analysis and country responses, education systems highlighted in bold are those where the policy priority was identified by both the OECD and the education system.

Source: OECD (2019^[38]), *Education Policy Outlook 2019: Working Together to Help Students Achieve their Potential*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ad56e-en>.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934240845>

Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum. Along with trust, transparency is essential to inspiring ownership and supporting sustained implementation (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[2]). Opacity of responsibilities can harm CfE to the extent that it can be difficult for stakeholders to address the relevant interlocutors. As a result, schools’ needs might go unaddressed, or alternatives to the system in place might be found, which contributes again to the confusion of roles and responsibilities.

The CfE-related responsibilities of different natures – policy governance, political responsibility, everyday implementation – are described on paper, but the OECD team noted a lack of clarity in their definition and distribution between stakeholders. In practice, this lack of clarity can be noted at almost all levels of the education system. Stakeholders met by the OECD team highlighted the duplication of functions between different groups. They also emphasised a need for clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each actor and their boundaries, especially between Education Scotland and SQA, RICs and local authorities, and between schools, local authorities and central government (when it comes to curriculum design) (OECD, 2020^[1]).

Parliamentary enquiries conducted in 2017 looked into the roles of key education bodies, with specific attention to the link between their overall role in education and their responsibilities in CfE implementation.

The enquiries found, for instance, that the distribution of responsibilities between Education Scotland and the Scottish Government in the different areas of development and implementation of CfE required more clarity. Response to the enquiry included a commitment by the Cabinet Secretary to undertake a review of the issue (The Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee, 2017^[39]).

The distribution of CfE-related responsibilities between local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives also lacks clarity in practice. The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. As mentioned above, local authorities participate in CfE developments at the national level and support implementation at the school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms. Established in 2017/18, RICs intend to promote local authorities' collaboration, thus increasing their reach and effectiveness in supporting schools and working from a meso-level to build capacity in teachers and curriculum leadership across the system. This initiative was launched in part in response to the 2015 OECD recommendation to “strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the ‘middle’” and “develop a coherent strategy for building teacher and leadership social capital” (OECD, 2015^[35]). A full review of RICs' performance is expected to report in 2021. In general, the practitioners interviewed by the OECD either had difficulties identifying the responsibilities of local authorities compared to that of RICs, or they were not aware of RICs' role altogether:

“If you ask most teachers and headteachers across Scotland, they don't see what RICs are about. The RICs discuss a lot, but between other players, of school improvement. It is a nice idea, but not adding much for practitioners. They forgot that local collaboration happens at local level, and that the funds used for RICs would be much more useful at local level.” (OECD, 2020^[11])

In some instances, however, evidence reported to the OECD shows that RICs hold potential to increase collaboration across local authorities, as some have already achieved greater and needed collaboration:

“For instance [a particular RIC] has provided great support for schools to ask pupils what they want every year and use that to plan their curriculum areas and industry partnerships to offer greater choice in a cohesive manner through the eight local authorities.” (OECD, 2020^[11])

The responsibilities assumed by local authorities vary significantly across Scotland, and similarly for Regional Improvement Collaboratives, which accentuates the lack of readability of the system around CfE. The majority of legal responsibility for education sits with local authorities. Theoretically, such a system can help in the context of a curriculum policy that, like CfE, seeks flexibility to best answer students' needs while not letting full responsibility rely on schools alone. However, the variability observed in local authorities' approaches means that decisions that one school leader has the power to make in a given local authority can be taken by the local authority itself elsewhere in Scotland. As highlighted in both OECD interviews and other reports, this adds to the system's lack of transparency for teachers, school leaders and parents (Scottish Government, 2017^[40]).

“Education is devolved to local authorities. So the government sets the objective, but the strategy to achieve it is up to local authorities, who all have their own understanding, which often results in very different strategies. So teachers themselves have to interpret their local authority's strategy to deliver.” (OECD, 2020^[11])

Over the last few decades, many OECD countries have decentralised their education systems, giving schools and local school authorities greater autonomy to respond more directly to citizens' needs. Yet ministries of education remain responsible for ensuring high-quality education for all. Traditional forms of accountability, based on a vertical hierarchy between lower decentralised levels and central ministries, are increasingly being complemented by new forms of accountability that involve the voices of more stakeholders. The most successful systems are able to constructively combine the multiple sources of information to ensure adequate transparency and adherence to achievement goals as well as reflect broad societal aims for education (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[21]).

The case of Sweden's shift of education decision-making responsibilities to the municipal level in the early 1990s speaks of the importance of clarifying responsibilities among stakeholders. The reform increased

municipal autonomy and devolved virtually all responsibility regarding education to the municipal governance structures, in a system with a strong tradition of vertical accountability. However, lacking a clear understanding of new responsibilities and roles of local stakeholders, municipalities did not change their processes as envisioned. Instead, municipalities generated a variety of different structures and strategies for educational governance, which inhibited mutual learning and were often unsuited to internal evaluation and meeting local demands (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[2]).

One key area in which school practitioners wish there were more transparency on responsibilities is in professional learning and support for curriculum design. Some opportunities are offered through Education Scotland and the RICs, as well as through local authorities' own support strategies. However, teachers also seek opportunities via national professional associations (such as EIS, SSTA, SLS, NASUWT, AHDS) and programmes with universities, private foundations, or selective professional networks (such as BOCOSH). Although there are many development opportunities, they depend most often on teachers' own knowledge and research. Repeated requests by practitioners were made during interviews with the OECD team for more clarity on providers of quality support for curriculum design, and a more streamlined offer (OECD, 2020^[1]).

Inherited from the intense involvement of stakeholders in Scotland, a significant number of bodies, committees and other councils are involved with implementing and advising on CfE, including the Scottish Education Council, the Curriculum and Assessment Board, and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education (Table 3.1). Overall, these platforms for stakeholder engagement contribute to creating confusion and slow process around CfE. The OECD team interviewed representatives of key bodies and consulted their meeting minutes available online to understand how the various bodies, and especially the SEC and CAB, contribute to CfE implementation.

The SEC is the main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017, which aims to provide strategic advice to ministers on education improvement; and lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the CAB and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers.

The CAB is the main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017, which oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education and considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all. It supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups and is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and the Chief Executive of Education Scotland. Members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, Skills Development Scotland and CLD representatives.

Both bodies were praised for opening a wider channel of communication between the Scottish Government and national agencies, and stakeholders. The CAB also successfully provided a few actionable inputs, including the drafting and publishing of the "refreshed CfE narrative" in 2019, following OECD recommendations (OECD, 2015^[35]).

In terms of the bodies, committees and other councils mentioned above, their respective mandate and relationships to each other are defined, but clear processes to organise their interactions and the outcomes from the various groups' actions are amiss. The role of SEC as the overarching body was questioned during OECD interviews, contrasting the willingness to embody a partnership approach to education policy making and its ability to translate policy in practical terms, with a purported lack of innovative thinking and imbalance between its members (Humes, 2020^[12]). Despite CAB's achievements, its members themselves acknowledged being uncertain about the roles and responsibilities of CAB in relation to other stakeholders and about their own role on the Board (OECD, 2020^[1]). The communication between CAB and SEC was reportedly limited, with little time granted to discussing each other's input, and no clear sign of action following presentation of CAB papers to SEC, for instance (Scottish Education Council, 2017-19^[41]).

Several reasons could be noted for the lack of clarity among Scottish stakeholders' responsibilities. First, sometimes the bodies, committees and institutions recently created to evolve with CfE policy took time to establish their role and find their voice in an already crowded system. The examples of the Curriculum Assessment Board and the Scottish Education Council highlighted above can in part be explained by the fact that both bodies were established in 2017, in replacement of – but with different mandates than – previous bodies, such as the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board and supporting structure. Furthermore, although Education Scotland was not restructured for CfE specifically, the development of its inspection and scrutiny functions, and of supporting leadership development and regional working in 2017, might contribute to the difficulties in identifying and fulfilling the institution's remit.

Second, instances were reported to the OECD team of organisations who took on responsibilities *de facto* because they had resources to respond to stakeholders' demands when they formulated them, even if such responsibilities might have been beyond their official mandate. Such shift is illustrated, for instance, in the fact that resources produced by the Scottish Qualifications Authority have remained the primary reference for teachers in upper-secondary education (Senior Phase), before resources produced by other bodies with statutory responsibility for curriculum support, such as local authorities and Education Scotland and predecessors.

As revealed by some practitioners, secondary schools tend to prioritise information and guidance on examinations coming from the SQA over other CfE-related guidance. The SQA produced detailed guidance as part of the development of updated qualifications (2012-16) when CfE was still in the early years of its implementation. The teaching profession was adjusting to its new role in curriculum design; the balance between schools' autonomy in curriculum design and central support and guidance was not yet found; national agencies had also developed a few resources to support curriculum design; and local authorities worked closely with their schools to offer them resources in support of CfE implementation. As a result, the offer of support resources varied across the system, often timely and useful but at times overwhelming and unclear to practitioners.

The challenge was especially significant in secondary schools, where the new CfE framework required learning to go beyond preparation for national qualifications. The teaching profession, seeking guidance to develop their curricula, turned to SQA's high-quality resources, which provide for each qualification a detailed course content, coursework, assessment structure and example of teaching resources in open share (see national qualifications pages in Scottish Qualifications Authority (2020-21^[42])). SQA's resources tended to be used as primary coursework in classrooms instead of coursework designed at the school level based on the CfE framework. This expanded use of SQA resources contributed to reinforcing the influence of SQA's work, from providing teachers with optional assessment guidance to effectively replacing curriculum resources (OECD, 2020^[1]).

A third reason why the distribution of responsibility is somewhat blurred is that most top administrative and executive positions in Scotland's education system tend to be held successively by a small number of agents. This tendency is shared with a number of other systems and is especially noticeable in Scotland due to the relatively small size of the education system. This rotation of high-ranking officials between positions in government, administration and agencies can help facilitate the dialogue between institutions and maintain a continuity sometimes necessary in public policy. It can, however, become an issue if this striving for dialogue and continuity cultivates a single perspective on education and prevents creative thinking and constructive challenging from within top decision-making processes (OECD, 2020^[1]; Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016^[2]). Although this might contribute to inter-organisational relations, it has been raised in discussions with the OECD team as a risk. If only the same people are constantly involved, where do new ideas and perspectives come from?

Scotland's system is heavily governed relative to its scale and numbers of schools. The multiple layers of governance and additional responsibilities created around CfE can complicate implementation processes by generating additional policy priorities and supplementary materials with little co-ordination. The

overwhelming number of organisations also draws quite heavily on system leadership capacity, with staff often moving from one organisation to the next or from one division to the next.

Communication for a shared meaning of Curriculum for Excellence

Communication is an important channel to develop shared meaning between stakeholders and foster ownership of a policy. There is a wide range of tools for communication in curriculum policy implementation, from official publications on professional or public channels, to dialogue and consultation exercises, and informal discussions through all the initiatives for stakeholder involvement. Developing an effective communication strategy that brings all these tools together is a stepping-stone for engaging stakeholders and garnering support and clarity around the change.

Scotland succeeded in establishing the education language of CfE over time, which the OECD team could observe while interviewing stakeholders from all levels of the system. The key terms of CfE, from the four capacities to curriculum entitlements, learner progression, and Experiences and Outcomes (“Es and Os”) seem to have made their way into daily discussions of education policy makers, teachers and learners alike. This ease with CfE language seems to owe in great part to teachers’ discussions around curriculum design within their schools and with other units, with learners and their parents. Entry to the profession of teachers taught about CfE during initial teacher education (ITE) has also helped install CfE language in schools. It was also helped originally by the ongoing discussions at the national level and within professional organisations, as well as by the publication of some common documents, including the *Building the Curriculum* series, the “Refreshed curriculum narrative”, and local authorities’ own support documents for schools.

By establishing a specific language, Scotland set the conditions necessary for stakeholders to develop a shared understanding around CfE. Generally, the key terms of CfE seem well understood by the education community and are especially in use by teachers and learners in Broad General Education. The OECD team also noted a clear willingness in teachers’ and schools’ collaboration efforts to guarantee that their understanding of CfE terms, especially of CfE levels and benchmarks, were the same across the system. Practitioners mentioned several ways in which they communicated and collaborated with teachers and other experts, including schools’ own initiatives, local authority and sometimes, RIC support, and organised professional networks. These types of collaborative structures help develop collective sense making and can further support curriculum implementation since they allow for discussion on the outcomes of the curriculum; create space for continuous feedback and knowledge sharing; reduce stakeholders’ anxiety and facilitate the shared interpretation; and contribute to building curriculum coherence (Pietarinen, Pyhältö and Soini, 2017^[43]).

Within a national framework, CfE allows for flexibility in school curricula, so it was pivotal in ensuring a shared understanding of the CfE vision and policy objectives, which seemed understood by the stakeholders, as reported to the OECD team. This is not an easy task, as evidence points to a number of instances where definitions and understandings differed within education systems. Stakeholders in education reform need a shared knowledge and understanding of the challenges they are seeking to address along with the meaning of the different facets or tools of reform (Kania and Kramer, 2011^[44]; Penuel et al., 2011^[45]). Even well-recognised key terms are not always understood in the same way. For instance, the Pupil Premium evaluation in the United Kingdom (England) noted that each school worked according to its own definition of educational disadvantage. Developing modalities for ensuring that policies are well understood and not taking for granted that understanding of phenomena and specific challenges will be the same across the system can help avoid problems in implementation processes (OECD, 2018^[17]).

Effective policy implementation requires having shared values and a shared mission, as it can foster the collaborative processes essential for success (Huffman, 2003^[46]; Innes and Booher, 2018^[47]). In many

school systems, this may require a greater focus on long-term goals in school systems in order to meet the immediate challenges a reform may bring (Duckworth, Quinn and Seligman, 2009^[48]). In addition, regardless of the level of decentralisation of a system, national leadership to “co-ordinate through partnership”, by developing clear guidelines and goals and providing feedback on progress, remains very important to support stakeholders in implementation processes (Burns and Köster, 2016^[49]).

One issue acknowledged by stakeholders is that communication around CfE has become confusing and unhelpful (OECD, 2020^[1]). The documentation originally aimed to clarify CfE grew significantly, reaching what was sometimes referred to as “the 20 000 pages” of CfE. In part due to a willingness to support schools as they developed their curriculum, many entities, including government, national agencies and local authorities, published guidance and information about CfE until 2015, sometimes re-interpreting elements and creating possible confusion for teachers and learners (Scottish Government, 2019^[50]). The constant production and recycling of documentation was often described as “overwhelming” by the practitioners it was designed to support, and as “confused” or “hard to find” by the parents and learners it was supposed to guide (OECD, 2020^[1]). Surveying the documentation available on the websites of Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, local authorities and partners gave a similar impression to the OECD team. Sustaining effective and constructive communication is difficult, especially about a curriculum designed by schools, but it is possible to design and follow a communication strategy that helps implementation. The example of Wales’ successful communication strategy around its new curriculum policy is enlightening (Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. An effective communication strategy around the Curriculum for Wales (United Kingdom)

The new Curriculum for Wales 2022 is the cornerstone of the country’s efforts to pivot its education system from a performance-driven education with a narrow focus to an education led by commonly defined, learner-centred purposes. It is embedded in “Education in Wales: Our National Mission”, a plan for 2017-21 that presents the national vision for education and calls for all children and young people to achieve the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Wales’ success in mobilising all key education stakeholders for its reform agenda is due, at least in part, to the active communication strategy the Welsh Government and some of the middle tier actors have consistently adopted. The brand “Our National Mission” was developed, and associated terms such as “transformational curriculum” and “enabling objectives” have effectively brought coherence and clarity to the development of the education reform journey, laying a strong basis for stakeholders to make the mission their own.

The Directorate’s communication strategy used a variety of channels online, on paper and live. The Minister held Question & Answer sessions, was consistently present at events, along with the Directorate, which was also active on social media, maintained a blog to help stakeholders keep up with the reform, and worked with designers to make the published content easier to read. A constant presence of key figures, such as the Minister and practitioners from all parts of Wales, also helped disseminate the message. Careful monitoring of discussions both on line and during events allowed the communication strategy to be adjusted, to clarify some issues with the curriculum policy, and debunk some of the myths through a variety of channels.

Source: OECD (2020^[33]) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4b483953-en>.

In 2016, Education Scotland published a “Statement for practitioners” and took down much of the documentation then online on a different website, in an attempt to streamline the CfE framework (Education Scotland, 2016^[51]). The effort continued with the “Refreshed curriculum narrative” published in 2019 by the

Scottish Government, intending to do away with the “technical jargon” that was not understood consistently. Stakeholders appreciated both efforts but remained cautious in reporting the effectiveness of clarity. For instance, the refreshed curriculum narrative was a welcome initiative, but it did not seem to address perceived ambiguities in the overall education mission and received little attention from stakeholders, given all the other policy documents.

Stakeholders qualified parts of the CfE language as “technical jargon” that had lost educational meaning and lent itself to interpretation. Often, the issue for effective communication is not in publishing long documents repeating the curriculum framework or developing each aspect separately. It is rather about going back to the meaning behind the words and guaranteeing that all stakeholders give the same meaning to key CfE words, such as “benchmarks” and “interdisciplinary learning”. Although discussions about curriculum and policy should not turn into semantic debates, the choice of words is important. If in the future, the CfE framework were to evolve to respond to needs, collaboration with scholars and practitioners would be desirable at the time of designing communication. The absence of consensus on educational terms and underlying values concerning education would make systematic improvement of curriculum difficult (Benavot, 2011^[52]). Continuous reference and integration of evidence as part of the dialogue between stakeholders during policy design and implementation can help to build a strong and informed consensus on the path forward. This is particularly vital in situations where stakeholders may have strong *a priori* beliefs tied to their identities and experiences (Burns and Köster, 2016^[49]).

Conclusion

This chapter considered the stakeholder engagement needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE. Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence. Significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE’s lifecycle, which have contributed to successes with CfE. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE and the communication and development of a shared language created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE’s vision. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework through curriculum delivery and policy changes.

Several challenges inherent to stakeholder engagement around CfE were highlighted, however:

- First, there is a gap between the seemingly intense involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the system and the confidence they have in their effective influence on decision making. Decision makers should earn back and nurture stakeholders’ trust so their engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation. Two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and consistency in terms of using stakeholders’ input.
- Second, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with too many stakeholders claiming ownership of CfE while not necessarily fulfilling the responsibilities that come with such ownership. Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum.
- Third, communication around CfE remains confused, which can hinder implementation by leaving CfE open to wide interpretations and overwhelm schools, learners and parents.

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4

Towards a coherent policy environment for Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

This chapter analyses how the current policy environment in Scotland (United Kingdom) supports or hinders the implementation of its Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Central to CfE's aspirations is teachers' capacity to be curriculum designers, and school leaders' ability to lead the curriculum process in schools. There has been significant progress in supporting this capacity, but this work has become more challenging for schools, given the need to respond to multiple new initiatives at local and national levels. This chapter explores the misalignment between CfE's aspirations and the system of qualifications, the need to get policies in place that deliver the right balance between curriculum autonomy and equity for students, and a need to align and perhaps simplify the many frameworks and strategies in the busy policy landscape. It concludes with recommendations that may pave the way to a more proactive and coherent policy environment.

The policy environment for curriculum implementation

The policy design and stakeholder engagement dimensions of the OECD Framework for Education Policy Implementation focus on issues in which policy makers have direct discretion and can act to facilitate curriculum implementation. Contextual or environmental factors, which condition stakeholders' agency and ability to implement reform, are equally important but sometimes difficult to adjust in the short term. Part of the policy maker's task is to consider them when designing the policy and when supporting the policy into implementation as they will greatly influence the change process.

Across many education systems, traditional understandings of successful policy implementation as fidelity to the goals and requirements of reform have required implementers of a policy to be recipients of policy decisions. Implementation was viewed as a straightforward technical process, and implementation "failures" in education were usually blamed on teachers and school leaders who were not doing what they were mandated to do by policy makers. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), from the beginning, was a policy that implied significant shifts in the culture and structures of Scottish education to create a conducive policy environment to support a new vision of curriculum and of teachers as curriculum makers.

This chapter considers three major issues of the Scottish policy environment and the degree to which they support or hinder CfE. Significant progress has been made towards system leadership for CfE, leadership capacity for curriculum change and creating policies that enhance CfE. Some issues remain, however, including those related to policy coherence around CfE, particularly regarding assessment and evaluation, and system governance.

Flexibility management: The challenge for teachers and school leaders

The success of curriculum innovations such as CfE, which require more of teachers than fidelity to centrally prescribed programmes of study, relies heavily on the capacity, culture and status of the teaching profession and the quality of school leadership (Gouëdard et al., 2020^[1]). Systems that promote such local innovation and strive for the empowerment of system actors – including learners – require strong system leaders to drive a culture that is empowered and accountable, and who can present a compelling case for the education system to the media, politicians and the general public.

The flexibility and autonomy afforded to teachers and schools by CfE are highly valued by the teaching profession, and appreciated by parents and other stakeholders. In turn, most stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team saw teachers as highly qualified professionals able to realise CfE's ambitions and agreed that significant progress had been made towards CfE implementation. There was positive feedback on the professional support provided to date to teachers and school leaders in support of CfE. Stakeholders endorsed the commitment in CfE to meet the needs of learners and the flexibility afforded to schools to respond to local needs and personalise their curriculum for learners. The OECD team also observed how leaders and schools used curriculum flexibility to deliver creative responses to the challenges posed by rural and island locations, in areas of dispersed populations and in small schools, through the use of consortia of schools and technology to support the principle of curriculum breadth for students (OECD, 2020^[2]).

However, CfE flexibility can also be a double-edged sword: flexibility inevitably gives rise to variation, and in discussions, the degree of variation in how CfE was experienced by learners across Scotland (United Kingdom) was a concern. For system-level leaders, this concern was about a variation in quality across the school system. The OECD project on Education 2030 shows that many systems depend on local leadership for the design of curriculum at the school level to meet the needs of learners and support this flexibility with an appropriately robust evaluation framework (OECD, 2020^[3]). For others who

expressed concern about variability, the issue was the degree of variability in how the curriculum was organised, and consequences for student outcomes, and, importantly, system equity.

New research conducted with headteachers in Scotland as part of a Nuffield project highlights the degree of variation in how the curriculum is structured for students in secondary schools, for example. The research found that 82% of schools organise this phase of schooling as a 3+3 model (three years of Broad General Education [BGE] followed by three years of Senior Phase) as envisaged by CfE. But 18%, including all the independent schools in the sample, maintain the old 2+2+2 model (previous curriculum model divided into two-year periods) (Shapira et al., 2021^[4]).

The same study found considerable differences in the year of schooling when students make their first subject choice. In the sample of headteachers, 14% reported that this happened in S1, 51% in S2 and 34% in S3. Clearly, the implementation of CfE in the secondary phase remains a work in progress, with schools moving at different rates away from what was. However, given the well-documented relationship between subject choice and educational outcomes in secondary schools, variation of this scale would be a cause for concern in any system. For Scotland, it is particularly worrying given the importance of subject choice in determining entry to higher education (HE). A study comparing differences in entry to HE in Ireland and Scotland showed that inequalities in entry to HE were explained by subject choice in Scotland, whereas in Ireland (where students take fewer subjects), they are more closely associated with academic performance (Iannelli, Smyth and Klein, 2015^[5]). These particular variations are associated with some of the assessment and qualifications issues identified in the review. However, they are also a reminder that when schools exercise their much-valued “flexibility to meet the needs of students”, it may not always work in the interests of their students in the longer term, nor may it serve system goals towards equity.

A further challenge arising from the flexibility that is at the heart of CfE is the level of demand on teachers as curriculum makers in their own schools. It was clear to the OECD team that the teaching profession greatly valued this role; teachers saw themselves as active participants in the curriculum process, and they saw their work as reaching well beyond the technical delivery of the centrally prescribed curriculum. However, there is an obvious mismatch in the Scottish system between the curriculum-making role of teachers and the comparatively high class contact hours of teachers across the system. As noted in Chapter 1, teaching time has evolved in Scotland between 2000 and 2019: it dropped by 95 hours at pre-primary and primary levels, as part of a teachers’ agreement that introduced the 35-hour working week, resulting in a maximum of 22.5 hours of teaching per week for primary, secondary and special education teachers. Even with this decrease in net contact time, the maximum time that teachers at these levels can be required to teach is still longer than the OECD average (OECD, 2019^[6]). The sustainability of this above-average allocation, together with the expectations that teachers engage in local curriculum development that in turn delivers the CfE ambitions for all learners, is an open question.

In discussions with school leaders and teachers about how decisions about curriculum are made at the school level, the needs of the students and the competence of teachers and school leadership were always referenced. But they also identified other factors. Finding time for teachers to plan collaboratively and to work together on moderation was mentioned as a challenge. The role of local authorities in setting priorities for schools and the potentially constraining roles of locally mandated approaches and initiatives were identified as significant factors for school-level curriculum planning and innovation. On the other hand, the scale and type of support for professional learning in schools, whether this was provided by a local authority or Education Scotland, was identified as positive support for local empowerment. The OECD team heard many positive examples of this taking place across Scotland.

Similar contrasting views of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) were also expressed. For some school leaders, these were seen as an additional layer of “the hierarchy”, “another initiative to deal with”, or “some other group to report to”. Others took a more positive view, seeing them as an important support for local empowerment, an “important platform to share good practice”, and potentially a “successful meso-system” to support CfE work in schools (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Other contextual factors may limit teachers and school leaders. Recent research about the implementation of health and well-being in CfE points to constraints experienced by teachers, for example, especially those working in schools serving high poverty communities (Hardley, Gray and McQuillan, 2020^[7]). For teachers at the secondary level, the biggest constraint appears to be the spectre of qualifications (see discussion below). In common with other education systems, concern for the well-being of children and young people in society has led to new pressures and expectations for schools (OECD, 2018^[8]). Recognition that students who feel well learn well is widely shared and schools have an important role, not just in responding to the well-being concerns of society but in actively promoting and supporting student well-being. In discussions with the OECD team, it was evident that education stakeholders, system leaders, school leaders, teachers and learners placed a high priority on well-being and saw the flexibility of CfE as central to school efforts to support and enhance it. This was particularly strong in primary education, where the focus on student well-being was shared by the children who met the OECD team. CfE affords schools the flexibility to focus on and promote well-being, but in some discussions, school-level actors noted that the complexity of some well-being issues – such as anxiety and other mental health concerns – were often beyond the capacity of schools to respond. This was even more evident during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

While well-being and the challenges of supporting the well-being of adolescents did feature in discussions with students, teachers and school leaders of post-primary schools, these discussions were more likely to move quickly to matters of qualifications, subject choice, and transition to the Senior Phase. The OECD team was struck by the absence of any explicit references to CfE from many of the discussions with post-primary leaders, with the notable exception of the four capacities, which were consistently mentioned as overarching aspirations for schools. It was equally notable that “successful learners” was given the highest priority of the four capacities.

Thus the autonomy promoted by CfE depends not only on the capacity of the teachers and school leaders to respond to that autonomy with expertise in curriculum design. It also depends on the interaction between individual actors and institutions, and on local and other pressures placed on schools by the policy context and environment, the social and cultural context of the school and the wider societal well-being of children and young people. The autonomy of schools when it comes to CfE is affected by the external context; those constraints are not the same for all schools or sectors of the system.

Moderating and making sense of that policy context and environment for schools, managing constraints, and protecting that autonomy is part of the work of school leadership in the Scottish system. Scotland has prioritised the support and development of school leadership as a policy goal, and the OECD team had discussions with some outstanding school leaders who are exercising this autonomy. It was notable in those discussions that school leaders see their role as interpreting the policy context for their school to ensure that the school and the teachers are protected from policy incoherence and overload. Leaders see themselves as filtering what was relevant and appropriate for the school from the proliferation of policy initiatives at the local and national levels. Of note, in complex education systems, this has become a key role of school leadership (Pont, 2020^[9]). School leaders appear to have strong local networks, particularly across local authorities and are committed to the communities and regions where they work.

The agency and empowerment of teachers to make decisions in the interests of the children and young people in their classrooms are highly valued in Scotland. An evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations of a review of teacher education in 2010 found evidence of progress in four areas. It found that teachers were more engaged with professional learning and had a greater sense of ownership of their own career-long professional learning. There was a greater focus on the impact of teacher professional learning on students with consideration of the needs of students informing decisions on professional learning. Notably for CfE implementation, it concluded that there had been a cultural shift towards more professional dialogue at the school level, and it found that there was a greater willingness than previously to try new teaching practices (Black et al., 2016^[10]).

Interestingly, this evaluation identified two particular challenges for teacher professional learning. The first was the practical one of securing replacements for classes when teachers attend professional learning events. The second was the array of “competing national priorities” that colonised teacher professional learning. Prior analysis of the meaning of teacher leadership in the Scottish model for professional learning raised the issue that trying to pursue different and sometimes competing political agendas contributed to confusion in the conceptual underpinnings of initiatives to promote teachers as educational leaders (Torrance and Humes, 2014^[11]). This “competition” was consistently raised with the OECD team as impacting teacher and leader agency at the school level. Managing those competing demands continues to drain the energy and capacity of teachers and school leaders. The OECD team was struck by how often school leaders described the gatekeeping and management of competing demands – as one memorably said, “the need to protect my staff” – as central to their role (OECD, 2020^[2]). Freeing up some of that capacity to provide more leadership for and in schools, particularly to support CfE across all sectors of the school system, should be an important priority.

A promise to align assessment and qualifications to Curriculum for Excellence

Building the Curriculum 5, from the series of CfE documents, proposed a comprehensive framework for ages 3 to 18 years for assessment across the education system as part of CfE (Scottish Government, 2011^[12]). This representation of the framework has been accessed by systems and researchers worldwide as an exemplar of an assessment framework with a clear focus on the centrality of the learner and an articulation of the different purposes of assessment – again prioritising the focus on student learning. The role of teachers in the assessment process is notable in the framework. The document also stresses the need for a programme of continuous professional development (CPD) to support teachers’ assessment capacity to assess with confidence and consistency. The document acknowledges the importance of qualifications in the Senior Phase but notes that the “next generation of qualifications within CfE” will build on the same curriculum priorities and serve the four capacities of CfE. The importance of transitions in that context is also stressed – transition from BGE, and transition to further and higher education. The framework promises much in support of CfE; there is a strong alignment of principles and focus. Arguably, however, the promise has yet to be delivered.

Building the Curriculum 5 is not a single document but a set of documents that provide additional guidance on different aspects of the framework – reporting, standards, recognising achievement, and quality assurance and moderation. An analysis of these documents shows that their focus is on the BGE rather than on the Senior Phase and that the guidance is at a high level, with considerable local autonomy proposed (in line with other aspects of CfE).

In the decade since the publication of the assessment framework and supporting guidance, one of the most notable successes has been the realisation of that commitment to the professionalism and agency of teachers in the assessment process. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) sustained that commitment; assessment is one of the improvement drivers, but the judgement of teachers is identified as central to that process. The new census-based standardised assessments (Scottish National Standardised Assessments [SNSA]) are presented as low-stakes to provide teachers with diagnostic information on children’s literacy and numeracy to support teachers’ assessment and plan for effective teaching. In avoiding the pitfalls of high-stakes testing in the school system, Scotland has positioned teacher’s professional assessment work as pivotal for the quality of student learning. The controversies around the P1 assessments (reviewed following their first round of implementation) focused on the appropriateness of assessments of this kind for children in P1, how the data might be used at the national level and notably, the suitability of assessments of this kind for the play-based curriculum advocated by CfE for this stage of learning.

As the SNSA continues to be rolled out, Scotland now has a well-developed and widely shared view of the centrality of teachers in the assessment process. The agency of teachers in assessment and the focus on providing teachers with tools (including census-based assessments) to support their judgement is a particular strength of the system, and one that is internationally regarded. The development of teacher assessment literacy through CPD and a new focus on assessment in teacher education programmes has resulted in greater confidence in teachers in their own assessment practice. That level of professionalism was striking in discussions with teachers (OECD, 2020^[2]). The review of the P1 assessments also noted that the majority of teachers felt prepared to use the data and found the training useful, even if they were less positive about the quality or usefulness of the assessment data presented to them (Reedy, 2019^[13]).

Within BGE, there is an explicit attempt to align curriculum and assessment through the use of levels and, since 2016, the benchmarks to support teacher judgement. Originally called “CfE benchmarks”, these are now widely referred to as simply the “benchmarks” and are described as the articulation of the national standards for each level (OECD, 2020^[2]). While the addition to the benchmarks was broadly welcomed in the system, they pose both curriculum and assessment challenges. As a tool to support teacher judgement, the benchmarks may be useful; however, despite explicit instructions to teachers and schools not to use them in this way, there is a real risk that they become the proxy curriculum – a checklist of content to be covered to meet the expectations of a particular level.

While the CfE levels and benchmarks are described as tools to support planning for learning and guides for teacher judgement, they are also the basis on which achievement is to be reported nationally; thus, the reports on the NIF, for example, reference aggregated data on the percentage of students achieving each level as reported by schools. While this data is interesting, reporting it on a national scale and tracking small changes in percentages as evidence of improvement or otherwise may not be giving the system the robust data needed to monitor student achievement. Some observed that the practice of reporting on levels might be giving rise to an impression of a rather static system or one that is at best inert, and at worst, not improving.

There is general confusion, confirmed by the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team, as to what data counts when it comes to student learning. Given CfE’s focus on the four capacities, the absence of data on how well students are achieving in three of these – the capacities beyond “successful learner”, which are harder to assess – is also noteworthy. The OECD team received much anecdotal evidence about how CfE appears to support and develop the four capacities during interviews with learners, their parents, teachers and system leaders (OECD, 2020^[2]). Beyond its own observations and examples in validated school self-evaluation reports, the OECD team observed no systematic evaluation data to support a judgement as to whether the aspirations articulated in the four capacities 20 years ago are being realised.

The OECD team was struck by the contestation around data on student learning more generally and by the absence of robust, authoritative longitudinal data (outside the data collected on qualifications) to inform decision making at the system level and to inform wider society, communities and parents about the outcomes of CfE. The public in Scotland has access to lots of data about the education system, including details on the numbers of students attaining CfE levels and qualifications at each level of the framework of qualifications, as well as NIF evidence and case studies of school improvement. This commitment to data transparency at every level of the system is good practice but is not matched by the quality of the data available. More robust and better quality data on student achievement over time in Scotland would better support public debate and political decision making in the future. It would also be a better reflection of the high priority given to education by the Scottish Government, the media and the public.

Robust system-level data are needed on how well children are learning and progressing, in order to support the implementation of CfE and inform curriculum reviews and developments at system and school level. Scotland needs a single source of truth (SSOT) approach to student achievement; SSOT approaches ensure that in any system or organisation decisions are made based on the same evidence and data. A step towards this would greatly enhance the system’s overall stability, and support measured responses

to external system data such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which only provide a picture of performance for 15-year-olds, not capturing those in the Senior Phase.

While the four capacities remain the stated goals of CfE, as noted, three of them remain comparatively under-evaluated relative to “successful learner”. What does progress towards the other three capacities look like at each level, or even in each phase? How can Scotland know that CfE is delivering on its ambitions for Scotland’s children and young people? As part of a re-assessment of the original vision of CfE, some work might be undertaken to develop some specific and contemporary success indicators or a matrix of success for each of the four capacities that might be tailored for multiple audiences, including learners. Using this matrix as the basis for other research and evaluation measures would give coherence and focus to data collected on the impact and effectiveness of CfE.

The NIF contains data that aims to measure progress of the system at the national level. The framework and its data do not appear yet to be well supported across Scotland as providing a full picture of education system performance, or on its progress or full breadth of the richness of CfE. The absence of robust data on learning outcomes and progression on the four capacities leaves the system vulnerable to reliance only on international assessments for system intelligence. Participation in these kinds of international assessments, such as PISA, should complement data collected and reported regularly at the national level. Of note, the absence of this kind of data to support decision making in the attainment challenge has also been recently documented (Kintrea, 2020^[14]).

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), in collaboration with stakeholders, designed new national qualifications to align them with CfE and to certify learners’ achievement in developing the four capacities as well as the skills for learning, life and work. The new National Courses and qualifications aimed to provide high standards and a formal acknowledgement of learners’ achievements while ensuring at the same time continuity with the breadth and depth of learning sought at earlier levels of CfE. The qualifications were first introduced in 2013/14, then revised in 2016/17. In line with efforts to adopt a broader definition of educational success, the availability of vocational qualifications and the Foundation Apprenticeships emerging from the Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy (DYW) are also an important development and appear to be widely welcomed by stakeholders even if implementation is at an early stage (Scottish Government, 2021^[15]).

It would seem the ambition for reformed national qualifications to align with CfE has not been fully delivered to date, despite the early commitment in *Building the Curriculum 5* and the work of aligning National 4 with Level 4 of the curriculum. One of the clearest indicators of a misaligned assessment and evaluation system is when stakeholders say, “We don’t want to do this but the examination/test process makes us do it.” The OECD team heard this many times in the course of discussions of CfE, especially with stakeholders from the secondary system (OECD, 2020^[2]). There may well be historical reasons why the qualifications did not develop as originally planned as part of a unified 3 to 18 curriculum, but the current two-stage secondary phase that has evolved is now the most significant barrier to implementing CfE for learners in secondary school. Indeed, the backwash from the misalignment in the secondary stage may even be felt in primary schools, as concerns about readiness for subject choice and examination success were mentioned by primary school parents and school leaders (OECD, 2020^[2]) (see also Chapter 2).

The disconnect between the qualifications in the Senior Phase and CfE’s philosophy hinder the relevance of the first and the power of the second. Many stakeholders interviewed expressed doubts as to how well the public understands the greater diversity in qualifications now available in schools. Notably, the OECD team was struck by the absence of any reference to National 4 and National 5 in discussions on assessment and qualification in the Senior Phase. Stakeholders agreed, on the other hand, that there remains one accepted and widely understood measure of success in the Senior Phase – the attainment of five Higher qualifications. The OECD team noted that in discussions on the Senior Phase, and much of secondary education, the four capacities are displaced by the five Highers as the purpose of the curriculum at this stage. Notably, learners, particularly those who had attained their Highers and are now working

towards Advanced Highers, commented that they had set aside any aspirations towards the four capacities to undertake the “two-term dash” for their Higher qualification and the rote learning needed to attain these qualifications. Learners spoke positively about accessing vocational qualifications as part of their Higher experience. Interestingly given concerns about curriculum breadth in CfE, learners saw these vocational options as giving them a broader experience (OECD, 2020^[2]).

The final stage of secondary education poses some complex policy challenges. A recent review commissioned to support reform in that phase of education in Ireland examined trends across nine jurisdictions (O’Donnell, 2018^[16]). While there were some common features identified – explicit attempts to integrate vocational studies into what have been traditional academic tracks, for example – the differences between systems at this stage are striking, reflecting national priorities for education and economic and social development, among other contextual factors. Because this phase is the “frontier” that leads to economic, civic and social agency for learners, it is subject to the greatest level of public and media interest. This interest focuses in particular on the assessment arrangements for this, the final stage of schooling.

Designing an assessment system that can serve the multiple purposes of qualifications at this stage is challenging and generally involves trade-offs between purposes. Not all can be given the same priority. But qualification arrangements should at least not actively undermine the aims and purposes of the wider system (OECD, 2013^[17]). Is this happening in Scotland? The OECD heard mixed views on this. While, on the one hand, there is general acceptance that there is more work needed to better align qualifications in the Senior Phase, there was little appetite for more reform. The impact of COVID-19 on examinations across Europe has given new impetus to the reform of traditional end-of-school examinations. The pen and paper format has come under some scrutiny, but so too has the degree to which they prepare learners for the uncertainties and challenges ahead. Scotland’s early decision not to proceed with the Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021 and to rely instead on teacher judgement of evidence of learner attainment as the basis for these high-stakes awards will be important in informing next steps for these awards towards better alignment with CfE (Priestley et al., 2020^[18]). For many developed school systems, the vulnerability of traditional examinations, and the degree to which systems had to mobilise teacher judgement to support graduation from school and transition to further or higher education, has re-shaped debates about the future of high-stakes assessment.

In a recent address marking the tenth anniversary of his review of teacher education, Graham Donaldson suggested that the last decade in Scotland had seen increasing confusion about the role of assessment in student learning. He suggested that Scotland now had a “confused set of practices” (Donaldson, 2021^[19]). The OECD team would extend that analysis to include a somewhat confused set of policies, with some distance to travel to deliver on the promise of the integrated framework proposed in *Building the Curriculum 5*.

Many systems include school evaluation processes in their assessment and evaluation framework, thus connecting the quality of schools with the quality of children’s learning and achievements. The approach to inspection of education in Scotland had a long history of innovating with and for schools, particularly in supporting school self-evaluation. While the responsibilities for inspection of education is not the focus of this OECD review, the team was struck by the absence of references to inspection or to Education Scotland’s role as Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE, part of Education Scotland) in considerations of CfE as a school-led process. The unusual configuration of an inspectorate of education as part of an organisation that is also responsible for supporting school leaders, curriculum design and support, teacher professional learning and a range of other initiatives is noteworthy, particularly in a system where the autonomy of schools in curriculum making and in planning for teaching and learning is so highly valued. Across countries, school evaluation and inspection systems are important means of managing the tensions between local flexibility and national consistency. In recent years, many systems have moved to more decentralised models of inspections, including school self-evaluation and the development of self-evaluating networks of schools (in particular, local authorities, for example).

From competing priorities to a more coherent policy ecosystem for Curriculum for Excellence

The design of CfE as a framework for learners from the ages of 3 to 18 years was innovative for Scotland and visionary for the international community when it emerged in the early 2000s. Almost 20 years later, CfE is still remarkably relevant to Scotland's aspirations for a high-quality, future-oriented education for all its children and young people. The implementation of CfE across schools since its launch depended not only on dedicated support from teachers, leaders and the wider education community. For CfE to be implemented effectively, other policies and structures of the school system needed to evolve alongside to ensure that CfE was not a moment-in-time initiative but a reform that would be embedded and sustained. Scotland has made significant progress towards this kind of policy coherence for CfE. But more work remains.

Among the most notable efforts towards coherence was the positioning of CfE as one of the three supporting pillars of the education system alongside Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC, 2006) and Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (2014). The three pillars of support present as a significant and coherent structure – a pillar for what and how children learn (CfE), a pillar to support children's well-being (GIRFEC) and a pillar to support children and young people into meaningful work (DYW).

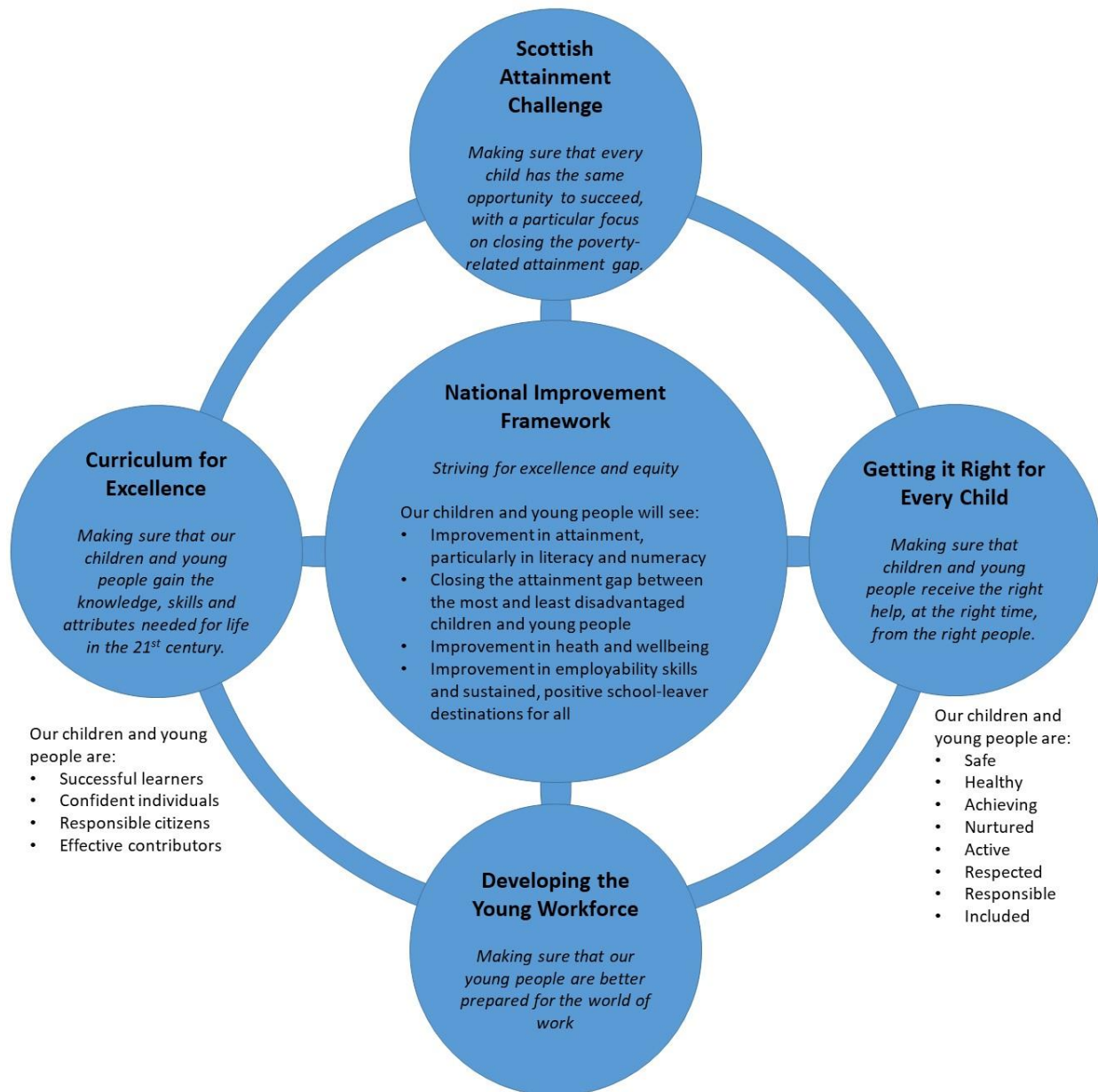
The absence of policy coherence is fragmentation. In fragmented systems, potentially high-impact reforms are launched, but within a relatively short period of time, they are invisible in schools and classrooms as teachers and school leaders have learnt that this “game-changing” initiative will be followed by another one soon. Although Scotland's is not a fragmented system, the OECD analysis identified two particular challenges for the coherence of CfE.

Discussions with the OECD team identified some initial attempts to support CfE that have, over time, become barriers to implementation. The policy space between the three pillars of Scottish education (DYF, GIRFEC, CfE) has become crowded with new policies in recent years. Additional policies and initiatives have been introduced, such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015 and the Joint Agreement on an Empowered System in 2019. The emergence of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives as part of the education policy landscape since 2015 is also noteworthy.

A recent report of Scotland's International Council of Education Advisors also noted the efforts made to balance and integrate CfE and NIF without one being eclipsed by the other (Scottish Government, 2021^[15]). While this is sage advice, it also points to the challenge faced by school leaders who have to balance the competing demands of two pillars, both ostensibly sharing the same purposes. The 2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan offers a new policy map of the system with the pillars replaced by “strategic frameworks”, with five of these identified in Figure 4.1 (Scottish Government, 2020^[20]). The figure places the NIF as the central framework, the others as support.

A further – and different – “map” of the policy environment was offered to the system early in 2021, when Education Scotland published guidance on the empowered system (Education Scotland, 2021^[21]). This is not mentioned in the up-to-date NIF policy map. An empowered system, according to the guidance, is where learners, teachers and leaders exercise and take initiative within and beyond the classroom in support of improved outcomes for learners. The empowered system is presented as an eight-piece jigsaw with separate guidance documents for each partner in the jigsaw to reflect on empowerment in their own context.

Figure 4.1. Relationship between the National Improvement Framework and the other strategic frameworks in Scottish education, 2021



Source: Scottish Government (2020^[20]), *Achieving Excellence and Equity - 2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan*, <https://tinyurl.com/kf3xtp49> [accessed on 21 April 2021].

For school leaders, teachers and the general public, these moving maps of the policy landscape and the emergence of new or revised initiatives and priorities generate a continuum of perception (OECD, 2020^[21]). At one end of this continuum is a dynamic and responsive system focused steadfastly on student learning and improvement; at the other, it can be driven by political or media criticism. The challenge of policy coherence and of locating the system on that continuum is not confined to Scotland. Education systems may suffer from “initiative overload” as rapid social, technological and economic changes place increasing pressures on schooling. In countries like Scotland, where there is strong public confidence and interest in education, these pressures can be particularly acute.

The OECD team heard a number of system stakeholders, including policy makers, researchers, teachers, school leaders, and parents, refer to increasing media hostility towards education in Scotland. For some schools, this resulted in moves towards conservatism in decision making to minimise the risk of any controversy. For leaders, it gave rise to a constant concern as to how an action or lack of action might be perceived by the media and, increasingly, on social media platforms. This is not a uniquely Scottish experience but added to the political priority placed on education, it makes for a high-pressure and sometimes hyperactive system, where the policies and initiatives may well be ambitious and well-constructed policies in themselves, but how they work as a policy system may not be immediately evident.

System governance and the policy cycle

Traditionally, Scotland has seen its education system as a source of national pride and granted great importance to educational issues in the political debate to a degree that would be the envy of many a system. This pride has contributed to the broad commitment to CfE and to Scotland's evident ongoing commitment to improving education in general. The importance afforded to education is also notable in the appreciation that system leaders and stakeholders show for their own role in education, and in the constructive approach that most actors adopt within the numerous governance boards, committees and other advisory groups. The high priority given to education is also reflected in the degree of political debate about education and the positioning of education as a key priority not just for the Learning Directorate but for all of the Scottish Government. The issue of unclear CfE ownership and responsibilities raised in Chapter 3 can aggravate the effect that the political debate has on CfE, meaning that contestation about CfE becomes inevitably political and urgent. There is pressure on senior leaders to react quickly to issues and debates.

As a consequence, Scotland's CfE exists within a busy policy landscape; the volume of documentation, policies and reviews is high and can sometimes be associated with policy overload. The OECD team was struck by the volume of guidance (and subsequent clarifications and additional guidance) that streamed from Education Scotland in particular. At one level, this is understandable given the extensive remit of Education Scotland. However, it may also be indicative of a system in constant reactive mode. The OECD team noted the absence of a policy review cycle – an identified timeline within which issues or concerns about aspects of CfE would be addressed in a process of systematic and scheduled review – which has proven valuable in similar education systems, although it is not present in many.

Such a systematic approach can also ensure that curriculum issues and controversies can be raised but then flagged for inclusion in the next review rather than requiring immediate, and often political, intervention. Recent work by the OECD looking at how different systems manage curriculum decision making showed that managing the momentum of this process can be challenging. Table 4.1 summarises some of the challenges highlighted by these systems and the strategies they use to tackle them. A key challenge is to identify a timeframe that is effective for the aspirations and structure of the system. Some countries have found that a ten-year timeframe may give system stability but at the expense of responsiveness. Others, that a process of rolling review can allow for an agile response as issues arise, but in turn generates constant change and updating. For systems that value consensus on curriculum, the time it takes to build consensus can delay much-needed reform (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Table 4.1. Challenges and strategies related to decision-making time lag in curriculum review

	Challenge/strategy	Countries/jurisdictions reporting the challenge/strategy
Challenges	Difficulty in building consensus on the direction of curriculum change	Argentina, Denmark, Korea, Viet Nam
	Delays resulting from the time requirement of a rigorous review process	Ontario (Canada), Estonia
Strategies	Limited responsiveness of periodic curriculum renewal cycles	Brazil, ¹ Hungary, India, ¹ Japan
	Engaging stakeholders in developing shared understanding and ownership of curriculum change	British Columbia (Canada), Ontario (Canada), Costa Rica, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Scotland (United Kingdom)
	Setting out a vision for the future of education to guide curriculum changes over time	British Columbia (Canada), Ontario (Canada), Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Singapore
	Engaging in ad hoc, partial or continuous reform	Québec (Canada), Denmark, Hong Kong (China), Ireland, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, United States, ¹ Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Scotland (United Kingdom)
	Articulating key curriculum concepts that endure over time	Australia, Brazil, ¹ British Columbia (Canada), Québec (Canada), India, ¹ Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Norway, Russian Federation, Singapore, Turkey, Viet Nam
	Creating space in the curriculum to accommodate new changes	Australia, Brazil, ¹ Québec (Canada), Saskatchewan (Canada), Czech Republic, Japan, New Zealand, Norway
	Using “learning to learn” as the centre of curriculum reform decisions	Finland, Hong Kong (China), India, ¹ New Zealand, Portugal
	Assessing the relevance of current curricular content through systemic reviews	Ontario (Canada), Mexico, New Zealand, Norway
	Digitalising the curriculum to facilitate faster change	Australia, Ontario (Canada), Denmark, Hong Kong (China), New Zealand, Norway

Note: 1. Responses for these countries were submitted by independent researchers, not government administrations.

Source: OECD (2020^[3]), *What Students Learn Matters: Towards a 21st Century Curriculum*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d86d4d9a-en>.

Scotland has not decided how or when it will conduct reviews; to date, including this one, reviews have been in response to a controversy rather than planned and proactive, and they have drawn on expertise external to the system.

While external perspectives can be useful from time to time, building internal system capacity for curriculum review, and trust and confidence in that capacity should now be prioritised for Scotland. A cycle of this kind requires three essential supports. First, it needs a systematic approach to data collection on the impact of the curriculum, as discussed earlier. Second, it needs access to independent research on an ongoing basis. And third, responsibility for the cycle of review needs to be assigned to an agency accountable to government and wider stakeholders that acts as owner and champion for CfE and where accountability for its quality and sustainability rests. Ironically, in Scotland’s system of many layers of agencies and organisations, this is a current gap.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the policy environment needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE; not just the kinds of policies needed to enable effective implementation, but the alignment between them that can give teachers and school leaders the agency to design the learning experiences promised for Scotland’s children and young people by CfE 20 years ago. The originality of CfE at the time of its development and its continued relevance and influence on the international stage continues to influence international curriculum policy; affording autonomy at the school level within a national framework is now widely used as a curriculum design principle (OECD, 2020^[2]). Other systems share the implementation challenges of these approaches.

This chapter identifies four challenges for Scotland in ensuring that the policy environment is conducive to the aspirations and implementation of CfE. The capacity of teachers and school leaders to be curriculum makers at the school level has developed since CfE was introduced, supported by a range of CPD and support materials. The review found that the capacity of teachers and school leaders and elements of system leadership were being constrained by multiple initiatives in a busy local and national policy environment. The promise of assessment aligned with CfE has not been fully realised, and the OECD is further supporting Scotland in this area via dedicated working paper options for Scotland to move forward with assessment and qualifications (Stobart, forthcoming^[22]). This gap is the most significant barrier to implementation in the secondary education level, with the backwash from qualifications in the Senior Phase shaping the experience of learners more than the aspirations of CfE. This alignment challenge extends beyond assessment. While the policy environment is crowded with multiple initiatives, gaps and misalignments remain – such as that in assessment, for example – and where new policies are introduced (or old ones revisited), alignment and coherence is an issue. Another gap in the policy environment is an established systematic review cycle for CfE supported by robust data and evidence.

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5

Considerations for the future of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

This chapter reviews the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and provides concrete recommendations for Scotland (United Kingdom) to consider taking on board following ten years of experience with the implementation of CfE in schools. It suggests that the next steps for CfE need to focus on students and their learning progress. This implies reviewing how CfE is consistently providing learning opportunities through the Senior Phase; clarifying ownership of CfE and regularity in responsibilities and communication; defining a stable institutionalised curriculum review process and an aligned assessment system; and gathering consistent data to monitor progress.

The active developments of the Scottish education system, its structure and performance, and the unexpected impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on society, the economy and education, provide a dynamic background to this OECD review.

While Scotland's results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) followed the OECD country averages and declined between 2009 and 2015, they remained stable between 2015 and 2018. New evidence from PISA 2018 showed Scottish students were among the top performers in central 21st century abilities, including their capacity to engage with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds significantly improved their performance. Attainment and positive destinations of school leavers and other indicators linked to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) also progressed in recent years.

Students are engaged in learning through Curriculum for Excellence, which started rolling out in schools in 2010. CfE aims to provide a holistic approach to learning, to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes. Based on a common framework, schools and their teachers have the responsibility to design their own curriculum. The government introduced a range of policies and strategies to support schools, teachers, and the education system with CfE, and to drive system performance to higher levels. Ten years after its first implementation across schools, a range of issues have become apparent.

How do students experience CfE and their learning as they progress through the system? The analysis undertaken for this assessment reflects on how CfE has delivered and can continue to deliver the best possible learning experience to prepare students for their future by looking at CfE and its change approach. To understand the implementation of CfE, this chapter explores the approach to implementation and how it has combined different dimensions to drive change across the system. Based on the questions below, the chapter provides a set of recommendations for action in the next stages.

- How has CfE been implemented from a student perspective? Is the CfE design working well for all students as they progress through the system?
- How have those shaping CfE been involved, and how can they engage most productively to continue delivering the best possible CfE?
- How has the policy environment contributed to CfE reaching all schools consistently?
- Has there been a clear and well-structured implementation strategy to review progress and plan the next steps?

An overview of the implementation approach

An implementation strategy refers to the co-ordinated actions taken following an initial decision on the design of a policy for it to become a reality. The policy itself may be defined in a document that provides an overarching vision and outlines the main components. The implementation strategy needs to be targeted towards action and can be updated and adapted according to progress made or issues that may arise (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[1]).

For its CfE, Scotland followed an implementation process of co-design and co-creation with education stakeholders. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the policy developments from an implementation perspective. The co-construction process has been undertaken through boards, such as the initially created Curriculum Review Group. Following the initial design of CfE, a Curriculum for Excellence Management Board was created to include key education stakeholders and review progress from a managerial perspective. The analysis of this group's meeting minutes shows that the discussions consisted mainly in progress updates in the various allocated tasks, but not in detecting challenges in CfE implementation, nor suggesting concrete solutions. In 2012, after implementing CfE in schools started in 2010, a specific implementation group was created under the CfE Management Board. This group focused on the implementation of CfE until its dissolution in 2017, when it was replaced by the Curriculum and

Assessment Board (CAB). The CAB meets regularly to review curriculum and assessment progress in relation to CfE and beyond. It undertakes analysis, inquiries and provides advice to the Scottish Government on emerging practice.

Table 5.1. Overview of CfE policy developments from an implementation perspective, 2002-20

	Implementation process lead	Policy document/progress
2002	Scottish Government (formerly Scottish Executive)	National Debate on Education: National consultation to determine what was working well and what needed to change in school education
2003	Scottish Government	Curriculum Review Group established to identify the key principles to be applied in the curriculum re-design for ages 3 to 18 years
2004	Curriculum Review Group together with Scottish Government	<i>A Curriculum for Excellence</i> published
	Curriculum Review Group	Research and review process by researchers to review existing guidelines and research findings Focus groups with practitioners and begin the process of developing simpler, prioritised curriculum guidelines
	Scottish Government	<i>Progress and Proposals</i> published <i>Building the Curriculum</i> series begun
2007-17	CfE Management Board created: Curriculum change process	Draft Experiences and Outcomes published
2008	CfE Management Board	<i>Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching</i> published
2009	CfE Management Board	Publication of the new curriculum guidelines
2010	Schools	Implementation of CfE in all schools
2011/12	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Developing new qualifications
2012-17	CfE Implementation Group created (part of CfE Management Board)	
2014	Scottish Government	Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (DYW)
2014	SQA	First Certification of New Nationals 1-5
2015	SQA	First Certification of New Higher
2015	Scottish Government	The Scottish Attainment Challenge
2016	Scottish Government	National Improvement Framework (NIF)
2016	Scottish Government	New Inspection model
2016	Scottish Government	<i>Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland</i> published
2016	SQA	First Certification of Advanced Higher CfE learning benchmarks
	CfE Management Board, upon recommendations by a dedicated working group and the SQA	Revised National Qualifications (agreement to move National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualification courses from a modular to a linear format, with endpoint assessment, removing the requirement for units). First certification of the revised National 5 assessments in August 2017
2017	Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB): Provide leadership and oversight of curriculum and assessment	
2018		<i>15-24 Learner Journey Review</i> report published
2018		The Scottish Learner Panel created
2019	Scottish Education Council established: Provide oversight of improvement in education.	
2019	Curriculum and Assessment Board	Refreshed curriculum narrative
2020	Scottish Government – Education Scotland	National E-learning offer (COVID-19)

Source: Scottish Government (2021^[2]), *Curriculum for Excellence 2020-2021 - OECD review: Initial evidence pack*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/oecd-independent-review-curriculum-excellence-2020-2021-initial-evidence-pack/>.

This CfE implementation process followed a clear path in its inception, with the preparation of all the materials for implementation in schools from 2010. As schools had to implement the curriculum, the

Scottish Government published materials and provided support based on advice from the CAB and others bodies. Following the publication of the *Building the Curriculum* series, however, the system adopted a somewhat ad hoc approach to CfE implementation and review. The material produced to support implementation came from various sources that were not always aligned, and lost coherence, until the *Statement for Practitioners* was published for clarification purposes in 2016.

The Scottish approach did not plan for a formal review of the CfE framework, although such a review cycle is common practice in curriculum policy in other education systems. The review conducted by the OECD in 2015 provided valuable insight about Scottish education, but its focus on CfE was solely in Broad General Education (BGE). What is more, an externally-led review, while useful, can only support the processes of internal review that most systems have in place for large-scale curriculum initiatives. Shaping and implementing education policy is always complex due to changes in governments and governance; the large number of stakeholders involved; and the long timespan associated with the implementation of education policy relative to other areas of public policy (OECD, 2020^[3]).

The vision of CfE has always been powerful, and the four capacities to be developed by all students offer a convincing set of success indicators for CfE. Complex competencies, such as the four capacities, can be extremely challenging to measure, however. It might be for this reason that initially, there was no long-term strategy established or metrics defined to evaluate progress with CfE implementation. Various policies introduced since CfE have addressed this initial gap to some degree. *The Learner Journey* review highlighted some of the impacts of CfE, and the NIF set a framework that could integrate indicators to understand progress with CfE. During the review meetings, the OECD team often heard that CfE was a philosophy rather than a curriculum policy. The lack of a clear implementation and evaluation strategy could have contributed to this thinking.

In 2016, following the OECD review of the Scottish education system, the Scottish Government took a series of measures to streamline, clarify and refresh CfE. These were meant to further clarify CfE and sharpen government priorities. Those measures also aimed to enhance understanding of progress in a range of areas highlighted in CfE and the equity and quality framework for action. More supports and guidance were offered to schools; and additional information and research were produced on progress made with CfE.

Many stakeholders are involved in analysis and reviews of CfE, bringing numerous perspectives to the table. From the OECD team's school visits, it was evident that CfE was implemented and consolidated in schools, especially through BGE. According to stakeholders, the intended learning is in place, and schools have been growing more confident in adopting CfE to match their learners' needs. There has been clarity on the four capacities and the objectives, but these have also been mixed with new priorities that may not align with CfE. As policy messages evolve, there is a risk that the focus on CfE disappears, risking that schools lose track of the overall coherence between CfE and the rest of the school improvement initiatives. Although Scotland's various school improvement initiatives are important, there is a need for coherence, for an organising structure, which CfE offers but can only deliver if it remains in focus.

CfE has been underway for ten years at the time of writing this report. A traditional policy implementation strategy is not what is needed. Rather, it would be valuable if Scotland developed a clear concept of where CfE needs to go and what actions need to be taken, so education in Scotland continues helping all young people learn, develop their resilience and thrive in the 21st century. It is unclear whether the CAB or any other system leader has a clear long-term strategy in relation to CfE or is reviewing its evolution in light of current developments and research in education more broadly. Having a longer-term strategy for CfE, for its revision if needed, with defined responsibilities and institutions that are stable and prepared for shaping the next steps would be an asset to CfE and the Scottish Government. Such a strategic and institutional development would also support policy alignment for schools and a coherent vision of student learning from ages 3 to 18 years. For the next steps, it will be important to develop a shared understanding of CfE's

contributions to effective student learning and well-being and to set up a policy-making and implementation process for CfE that is stable and has stakeholder support.

Progress with implementation of Curriculum for Excellence

The previous chapters pointed to Scotland's considerable achievements with CfE and to notable progress since 2015. The analysis also raised several issues that should be tackled for schools across the country to continue successful enactment of CfE, and for students to have a coherent learning trajectory from ages 3 to 18 that consolidates the four capacities consistently and prepares students for their future.

A bold initiative requiring a focus on the learner's journey

CfE as a policy was a bold initiative in its inception that has progressed and reached schools across Scotland. CfE's vision to achieve excellence for all students, embodied in the four capacities, is widely shared by stakeholders. Although initially developed in 2002-04, the vision remains relevant for its bold, future-oriented approach and continues to be an inspiring example equated with good practice internationally. Anecdotal evidence and international surveys point to some success in the impact CfE is having on learners' experiences, attitudes and outcomes, even if there is limited evaluation data at the level of Scotland's system. The emphasis on school-based curriculum design results in a wide variety of practices between schools and classrooms, which is positive when it allows teaching to respond to students' needs and ensure all can succeed. The attainment gap also appears to have somewhat decreased over the last decade.

The 20 years since the formulation of CfE have been marked by accelerated social, cultural and technological changes in Scotland and beyond. Two decades of educational research have given rise to new insights into how best to support student learning and into the kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to succeed and progress as learners. That CfE has stood the test of time and remains influential in curriculum policies across the globe is a testament to the strength and future focus of the original vision. It will remain relevant for Scotland and beyond if the leaders and stakeholders responsible for CfE look ahead to the next decades, informed by the insights from implementation from the last two decades.

CfE's complex framework works well in most schools in Broad General Education (for learners aged 3 to 15 years) and for learners taking Advanced Highers, where the concepts, pedagogical and learning approaches are coherent, and the implemented school curriculum appears consistent with policy intentions. The OECD team observed that knowledge still plays a key role in schools' curricula, and more prominently in the Senior Phase than in BGE. However, there is some ambiguity about the role of knowledge in a 21st century curriculum framework. Twenty years ago, many school systems adopted curricula that emphasised skills as a counterbalance to more traditional emphases on lists of "content" to be covered. The focus on these 21st century skills was also reflected in assessment reforms. In recent years, education systems – including Scotland's – have begun to consider how best to ensure that all students have access to 21st century knowledge and ways of knowing that support future learning and the development of metacognition. As a result, adjustments might be needed both in the concepts of CfE and the tools to put them into practice. What is more, the structure, learning practices and assessment approaches in the Senior Phase need adapting to be consistent with CfE's vision, and to allow for the smooth curriculum experience promised to learners from age 3 until the age of 18. Fundamental issues in the design of CfE for this phase need addressing, such as the balance between breadth and depth of learning, the role of knowledge, student choice, and alignment with student assessment for qualifications.

Teachers are well-trained and respected professionals in Scotland, and school leaders have developed strong pedagogical leadership capacities. In general, both teachers and school leaders are committed to

varied teaching approaches for student learning and have proven their ability to develop schools' own curriculum with some examples of excellent practice. Curriculum design and continuous improvement in teaching and pedagogical leadership require time and professional investment, which schools can only develop with continuous support from the system.

Towards a shared ownership of Curriculum for Excellence

Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence. Significant efforts were made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which contributed to wide support for CfE as a direction for Scottish education. Consultation and collaboration are at the core of CfE processes, as much in policy design as in curriculum planning, development and enactment. There seems to be a gap, however, between stakeholders' intense involvement and the impact of these views on effective enhancements to CfE implementation. Learners' input, in particular, does not appear to be taken into account enough in decision making, although Scotland is committed to consulting its youth. More generally, greater clarity is needed in the purpose of stakeholder engagement initiatives around CfE, and consistency in the use and impact of stakeholders' input.

The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for the conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfils their own responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework. At the same time, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with many owners lacking clarity about their responsibilities. Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum.

Scotland successfully developed an education language to support the philosophy of CfE that made its way into daily discussions of education policy makers, teachers and learners alike thanks to communication efforts by system leaders. CfE allows for flexibility in school curricula, so it was pivotal to ensure a shared understanding of CfE's vision and policy objectives. However, the constant production and recycling of documentation was often described as "overwhelming" by practitioners, and the terminology used was deemed too technical and lent itself to too much interpretation.

Continuing efforts towards alignment

The originality of CfE at the time of its development continues to influence international curriculum policy. Affording autonomy at the school level within a central framework, an innovation that CfE was among the first to undertake at the turn of the millennium, is now widely used as a curriculum design principle. Scotland made considerable progress in developing and supporting teachers' capacity to be curriculum makers, and the capacity of school leaders to lead the process of curriculum in their schools. This work has become more challenging for schools, given the need to respond to multiple new initiatives at local and national levels. A tension exists between Scotland's comparatively high rate of teachers' class contact time and the expectations for teachers to lead and plan curricula locally.

Other education policies were developed to build a system around the innovative philosophy brought by CfE: a pillar for what and how children learn (CfE), a pillar to support children's well-being (Getting it right for every child, GIRFEC) and a pillar to support young people into meaningful work (Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, DYW). Additional initiatives were introduced, such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015, the National Improvement Framework (NIF) in 2016, the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) in 2017, and the Joint Agreement on an Empowered System in 2019. Work remains on getting the policies in place that ensure the right balance between CfE autonomy and equity for students, and on aligning and simplifying the many frameworks and strategies for schools.

Early policy developments around CfE promised to align student assessment, qualification practices and system evaluation to the philosophy of CfE. The comprehensive Framework for Assessment designed in 2010 was hailed around the world as an exemplar with a clear focus on the centrality of the learner, and new tools such as the low-stakes Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) and revised national courses for qualifications were developed. Despite attempts to reform qualifications, misalignment between the aspirations of CfE and the system of qualifications has become a barrier to the implementation of CfE in secondary education. In addition, the data generated by current system monitoring and evaluation appear limited and do not provide the evidence to fully support and inform the future development of CfE.

Education is traditionally a source of pride in Scotland, which shows in the broad commitment to CfE and to educational excellence for all. It has been granted great importance in the political debate to a degree that would be the envy of many an education system. This importance has sometimes translated into a busy system at risk of policy and institutional overload. The centrality of education in the political debate allied with the absence of an identified cycle of policy review for CfE supported by robust data and evidence results in a reactive and oftentimes political approach, which is not the most efficient way to address issues with CfE and its implementation.

An adaptable approach to implementation

The implementation of CfE has followed a particular path to change without a long-term strategy. The Curriculum and Assessment Board and its predecessor provided a platform to engage many stakeholders, gather input and feedback and develop shared agreements on progress and challenges. It allowed for responsiveness to the challenges raised regarding CfE implementation. The absence of a clearly structured implementation strategy gave schools and local authorities significant freedom and autonomy to design and shape CfE's developments, possibly building capacity on the ground. Efforts were made to communicate about CfE and its developments, but in an ad hoc manner involving many documents, reports, supporting materials, without a clear sequence of events.

For the next steps, it will be important to develop a shared understanding of CfE's contributions to effective student learning and well-being and to set up a policy-making and implementation process for CfE that is stable and trusted by stakeholders. The suggestions proposed below bring together different dimensions to guide the actions of education stakeholders and institutions to consolidate high-quality learning experiences for students in Scotland. The next steps will require refining them from an actionable perspective into a coherent strategy: what needs to be done, by whom, when, and how will it be measured.

Recommendations for next steps: Focusing on student learning progress

Schools in Scotland have been quite successful in implementing CfE and are willing to make changes where challenges remain. CfE is well known and well supported by all those interviewed. It has been developed and improved through a co-design process. While they cannot be attributed directly to the latest reforms, results in global competences of 15-year-old students in PISA could be related to CfE and its broader concepts included in the four capacities. The NIF also shows progress in recent years in a number of indicators related to CfE. CfE also reflects a strong curriculum policy that has given education professionals agency to shape it and enact it in order to adapt to schools' and students' needs. With the first student cohorts having completed their education under CfE, and the experience gained, it is a good opportunity to review practice. It is common across high-performing education systems to review curriculum frameworks regularly, as Japan and Finland do every ten years. It is suggested that students' learning experiences and trajectories should be the focus to define the next steps of CfE's implementation.

Recommendation 1. Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from ages 3 to 18 years

1.1. Re-assess CfE's aspirational vision against emerging trends in education

Scotland should re-examine CfE's aspirational vision in meaning and practice to take account of developments in education and society over the past two decades, along with emerging trends. The core message of CfE remains relevant and inspirational for its bold, future-oriented approach. It has served as an example to many other countries, and its key message strongly resembles the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of the OECD (the Learning Compass), developed through research and peer exchanges. Scotland worked to refresh the narrative around CfE and develop its benchmarks. However, there still seem to be mismatches between the vision and some of CfE's building blocks. CfE was characterised to the OECD team as a "clash between 19th century assessment and 21st century curriculum", which seems to have contributed to the evolution of several interpretations of CfE's vision. Moreover, although CfE remains future-oriented in spirit, it is important to acknowledge the changes that have occurred both in education and society since CfE's inception.

Scotland could first consider updates to some of its vision's core elements and their implications for practice. Re-examining the vision after a full cycle of practice could help update and adjust core elements in light of over ten years of curriculum design and implementation in Scotland, also taking into account developments in curriculum research and education in general. This exercise needs to be different in nature and outcome from the production of the "Refreshed narrative of CfE". What lessons learnt from implementation and curriculum research might help adjust the vision to fit the ambitions of CfE even better 20 years on? Dialogues between various stakeholders might help clarify and simplify the core philosophy, confirm support, and identify and sharpen the understanding of persistent inconsistencies between ideals and practices. For example, efforts to reduce the attainment gap will not be possible solely through schooling and CfE in particular, as other socio-economic factors influence learner outcomes. It will require broader coalitions with welfare, housing and health policy, for example.

An important issue for clarification in the vision regards the role of knowledge in a 21st century curriculum such as CfE. It seems that the often-criticised lack of harmony between CfE's vision and the programme for the Senior Phase is partly due to the unclear position of knowledge in the four capacities. The role of knowledge in CfE should be made more explicit as part of the vision and the tools to operationalise it (such as the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities, and the "Experiences and Outcomes"). Knowledge could be better integrated into the capabilities and attributes of the "successful learner" capacity. This would allow the fundamental capacity to not only refer to becoming a successful learner in terms of meta-skills, but also to acquiring a solid knowledge base including the four types of knowledge (disciplinary, interdisciplinary, epistemic and procedural); to engage learners with ways of knowing (Boyd, 2019^[4]) within and across disciplines; and to strengthen them in their further studies, work and overall development.

Clarifications are also needed around the concept of knowledge itself, recognising that knowledge goes beyond disciplines and subjects; as well as around the way knowledge integrates with skills and attitudes (see the concept of competencies as defined in the OECD's Learning Compass) (OECD, 2019^[5]); and with the Scottish capabilities and attributes. Clarifying the role of knowledge in the vision of CfE is the first step to strengthen the coherence of CfE. This will also help re-align learning through BGE and the Senior Phase and support better progression and transition for learners. It will help correct imbalances between breadth and depth of learning (see also Recommendations 1.2. and 1.3.). This is possibly the focus for a first review as part of the structured review cycle (see Recommendation 3.4 below).

It is also important to recognise that the broad aims of CfE and the four purposes require considering the influence of the wider context in their accomplishment. Scotland should define indicators or a "matrix of success" aligned to the vision and four capacities to help understand students' progress across all four capacities. In addition to the National Improvement Framework's measures of literacy and numeracy, other

metrics informing progress on the four capacities are necessary, especially around health and well-being, enjoyment of learning and other key competencies. Although qualifications should remain one of the key indicators of this process, new metrics, along with new data collection tools (see Recommendation 3.3) and a shift in the communication strategy, will create a better understanding of students' progress with CfE and provide a more complete picture.

1.2. Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE

The aspirations for broad and rich (or “deep”) education for all learners should remain a strength of the Scottish education system. Scotland should find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE to deliver on its commitment to provide all learners with a rich learning experience throughout school education. Making the role of knowledge in CfE more explicit as part of the vision (see Recommendation 1.1) will start the conversation on breadth and depth of learning, but additional decisions are needed at several levels regarding the design of CfE. Scotland could consider how the design of CfE can better help learners consolidate a common base of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the end of BGE, and nurture and hone this base for them to progress seamlessly through the Senior Phase and the choices it offers.

CfE should first and foremost aim to develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes (taken together in “competencies”) as a common foundation for all students during BGE. More specialisation can come later in upper-secondary education. Having said that, there is a tension between breadth and depth of learning new knowledge: rich learning also implies “depth” of understanding, to avoid the internationally criticised “ocean-wide, inch-deep” approaches. A possible compromise to finding a balance between breadth and depth of learning would be to build upon CfE’s existing broader learning areas in general education, while later in secondary education, discipline-based subjects or work-focused courses become gradually more prominent. In the Senior Phase, when the number of subjects has decreased and once more time per subject is allowed, subjects should show their own merit, but also demonstrate their value in contributing to understanding and skills formation in interdisciplinary domains, themes and projects. Such an approach reflects the contemporary idea of equipping youngsters with a T-profile to prepare them for a range of challenges in further studies, work and life: a combination of strong basic skills in literacy and numeracy plus a broad, interdisciplinary foundation of competencies (the T’s horizontal bar), combined with deeper, more specialised disciplinary knowledge (the T’s vertical leg). Such subject knowledge should then focus less on the reproduction of facts to be memorised and more on the understanding of disciplinary core ideas and cross-cutting concepts, and also pay attention to characteristic ways of thinking and acting within subject-related professional practices.

A clear conclusion from current debates in Scotland is that breadth of learning cannot be equated with maximising the number of subjects a learner takes. A focus on adding subjects or themes at the school or central level, from which students would then have to choose, does not create a “broad” curriculum. There is, therefore, a need for processes to select, update, prioritise and combine learning aims and contents that give coherence and consistency to student learning trajectories. These processes should make clear and consistent distinctions in curriculum decisions and choices at the system, school and classroom level. In part, the selection, updating, prioritising and combining should be agreed upon as part of a structured review cycle of the CfE framework guided by the need to provide consistency of depth and breadth of learning for students, rather than by a selection of courses or subjects. For example, decisions could be made at this central level about the learning goals and contents of a limited number of core subjects or learning areas that all students would need to study over CfE levels and that would form the basis of progression to the full range of subjects in the Senior Phase. Some of these choices are better left to schools, teachers and learners (and their parents to a certain extent) to allow for flexible choices and variation in curriculum provision. An approach that reflects the principle of subsidiarity is suited to this process. Scotland’s intentions for the whole system should be stated clearly and provided in a simple, clear

and precise framework; schools should then be able to add and elaborate on this framework; and stimulate specifications of the “what” and “how” of teaching and learning during classroom enactment.

Following the subsidiarity approach, some guidance should be developed around the role of knowledge and ways of knowing (Boyd, 2019^[4]), to help schools and teachers find a balance between breadth and depth of learning. The entitlements and four capacities of the current framework suggest that CfE aims to provide solid foundations for the essential areas of literacy and numeracy and also give ample attention to health and well-being as part of all students’ learning experience. Moreover, the CfE framework also provides that all students need a broad offering of learning areas during BGE, while the Senior Phase offers possibilities to specialise. In order to guarantee that this progression is effective and coherent for all students, some common guidance is needed to help schools. At the central level, Scotland might consider refreshing the design of learning areas in BGE to better articulate the knowledge necessary at each stage and by the end of BGE, for all learners to develop broader competencies to prepare for deeper learning and specialisation in the Senior Phase and beyond.

To provide more detail without drifting towards strict specification in learning areas, it may be a helpful first step to formulate big ideas, as a growing number of education systems have been developing. Systems such as British Columbia (Canada), Korea, Norway and Singapore have been selecting broad overarching themes that relate to a number of subjects within curriculum areas of learning. Those key concepts or “big ideas” help ensure overall coherence in the curriculum and thus create criteria for what content should be included and what should be omitted (OECD, 2020^[6]). Better defining and using big ideas should help keep BGE broad and bring additional guarantees that BGE builds a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes common for all learners, beyond just literacy, numeracy, health and well-being. Big ideas could also help better organise learning and its progression from ages 3 to 18.

Overall, Scotland might consider creating guidance about the elements of knowledge to prioritise, and how to select and update and integrate them more clearly in curriculum areas. Guidance on how knowledge might focus on the knowledge and skills needed to progress to and succeed in the next level or phase of education. This guidance should be designed by teams of practitioners, in close co-operation with researchers and other stakeholders, with system leaders and curriculum experts facilitating the work. Teams of teachers from schools or school clusters could contribute and discuss their own knowledge priorities and how they are integrated across the four capacities and explain how they choose suitable pedagogical approaches. These contributions from practitioners should form the basis of CfE guidance on knowledge selection, prioritisation and update, rather than prescriptions “from above”. Such a process should use and stimulate horizontal professional collaboration and peer learning to design guidance based on practitioners’ experience and input from curriculum experts. Collaboration with external researchers is indeed advisable to increase the quality of those approaches.

1.3. Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE

Scotland could consider adapting the pedagogical and assessment practices and the structure of learning pathways in the Senior Phase to enhance learners’ experience of upper-secondary education in line with the aspirations of CfE’s four capacities. While re-assessing and perhaps readjusting the CfE vision will lessen the mismatches between the Senior Phase and the vision of CfE, it will also help to bridge the gap that students face in their transition from BGE to the Senior Phase. In particular, the adjustments should include considerations on the role of knowledge in the vision of CfE, emphasising its importance for learning along with skills and broader competencies, and clarifying its particular role in 21st century curricula (as opposed to traditional curriculum models). This would also contribute to correcting imbalances between breadth and depth present in the Senior Phase. In addition, challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment re-design in the Senior Phase, which should be better integrated in the CfE framework. This task needs broad and active involvement of representatives from further and higher education and from the world of work. Without addressing these challenges, the practices in the Senior

Phase may continue to lag in the essential curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment) and continue to have a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education.

First, Scotland needs to create more coherence and alignment within the Senior Phase, between the curricular vision, learning goals, pedagogy and assessment approaches. It should consider reviewing the coherence of CfE enactment for learners aged 15 to 18 years, as the qualifications focus the attention on “traditional” exam- and memory-based assessment, and limit the wider purpose and scope of CfE. Scotland may also reflect on the range of learning activities that appear narrow, with more “traditional” instructional patterns and an over-reliance on course and disciplinary knowledge coverage; as well as on the ambiguity on issues of student choice and breadth of learning in relation to the number of subjects, given that many subjects lack time for going into depth. Scotland may consider building on the experience and reasonable coherence existing in CfE for learners aged 3 to 15 years (as well as in Advanced Higher courses), where learning activities seem in line with the vision, and there is a commitment to varied instructional practices. Examples may be taken from the experience of schools that seem to be able to tailor the curriculum to students’ needs through the high quality of teachers, educational leadership and local and regional support for schools and professionals.

In addition, the approach to student assessment and the nature of the learning experience in the classroom will not change in the Senior Phase unless the approach to the assessment of qualifications is fully aligned to match CfE ambitions. At this point, it may be useful to consider a range of options that could even be piloted for the overall approach to student assessment:

- more portfolio assessment approaches, with rubrics that consider the entire curriculum spirit (in particular, the four capacities)
- more emphasis on flexible, formative and continuous assessment components than is currently the case (current emphasis is strong on all-in-one final, summative exam events even if other components exist)
- more use of digital opportunities for feedback and feedforward
- maintaining (even strengthening) a strong role for teacher judgements with appropriate, manageable and cost-effective means of moderation.

Second, the Senior Phase needs to offer a clear structure for the diversity of pathways it offers to learners. The OECD team recognises Scotland’s numerous efforts to diversify learning experiences in the Senior Phase, seeking variety in the choice of pathways, subject specialisation, and qualifications offered to students, which aligns well with CfE ambitions. A possibility to clarify the structure of the Senior Phase, without restricting its diversity, could be to define a number of typical pathways or profiles for upper-secondary education with a limited number of compulsory courses, specialisation courses, and room for additional or optional units. These should be designed taking into account the need for coherence for students in their learning pathways of CfE from ages 3 to 18 years. Schools’ curriculum and timetables within a school should allow for a different student to take the same course, either as a specialisation part of one’s profile, or as another’s optional course. Such a structure could help students and their parents better understand and navigate the choice of subjects and qualifications, allowing students both to take coherent bundles of courses and to design their own pathway as they see fit. To explore this or other feasible re-design alternatives for the Senior Phase, a wide spectrum of stakeholders, experts and partners from various fields should be involved in a collaborative process.

As a source of inspiration for this process, the conclusions from a recent comparative study on upper-secondary education across nine jurisdictions (O’Donnell, 2018^[7]) provides some food for thought for Scotland to enhance the Senior Phase experience. The study supports Scotland’s ambitions for its Senior Phase, as it highlights that upper-secondary education systems do not aim for a one-size-fits-all offer but rather to provide students with a range of options with a view to suiting their future destination and specific demands for upper-secondary alternatives to traditional academic pathways.

Other conclusions should further inspire Scotland to enhance the Senior Phase. First, it appears that upper-secondary education systems usually work with defined pathways broadly split between academic, vocational, and in-between tracks to provide some structure to student choice. Although the curriculum is determined by students' choice of pathway, the study of some compulsory subjects is usually a requirement for completion of upper-secondary courses. Bridging programmes to allow more permeability between tracks are developing, which lessen the weight of choice for students. Upper-secondary curricula and assessment systems are closely interwoven and interdependent, and official records of achievement, in addition to certificates, are a feature of this phase, serving the needs of students first, but also of future employers and educational institutions. Finally, the comparison points out that links between upper-secondary education and the previous and next phases of a student's career and education are crucial. Consequently, reforms introduced in this phase can have wide-ranging implications at individual and system levels.

1.4. Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research

Scotland should continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research. It should do so by developing the environment of curriculum design support around schools, including in supporting exchange and collaboration between practitioners for curriculum design and experimentation within and across schools, and collaboration between schools and universities.

With regards to the process of continuous curriculum improvement, Scotland should keep investing in curricular capacity building. The primary focus of those investments should be to strengthen the capacity for curriculum design by teachers and school leaders at local school levels through a variety of measures: time facilities; creating space for joint curriculum design and experimentation space within schools; fostering exchange and collaboration between teachers and school leaders across schools; providing school-specific support; encouraging collaboration with universities; and strengthening the curricular nature of regional networks.

Such an approach is also in line with the strategic principle of subsidiarity. Scotland should leave curricular decision making as much as possible close to practice, within a system-wide framework developed with schools and practitioners. This does not imply that schools should work in isolation from other agencies and stakeholders. Dialogue and interaction should be promoted with other system partners (teacher educators, administrators, inspectors, and the like).

In relation to capacity building at various levels and for various purposes, Scotland should intensify and co-ordinate research initiatives along various lines:

- Site-specific, collaborative approaches of researchers and practitioners around curricular issues, combining (joint) teacher professional learning, classroom improvement, school development; all contributing to site-specific curricular capacity building on the ground but also to (more generic) knowledge accumulation about successful curriculum change, for example by identifying and explaining successful practices.
- More system-wide monitoring on both the enacted curriculum (notably classroom practices) and the attained curriculum (student experiences, outcomes and destinations) to feed continuous improvement of curriculum policies and practices.
- Both approaches should contribute to a better collective, systemic learning system, also, in view of future, more periodical curriculum reviews (see Chapter 4), and hopefully also reducing excessive politicisation and ad hoc nature of the educational debate.

Recommendation 2. Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities

2.1. Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE

System leaders at Scotland's national and local levels could continue encouraging the involvement of stakeholders (and in particular, students) with CfE through well-structured and clearly defined engagement initiatives. Stakeholders need to see how their contributions are used in the consultation and how their engagement informs actions and decisions. Their involvement with CfE should follow a stable and purposeful approach that results in effective contributions to decision making. Currently, the sheer number of "invited" engagement mechanisms by system leaders, and of stakeholders' own initiatives blur the landscape, work against the effective inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes, and lessen the truly collaborative approach that Scotland could benefit from to enhance CfE implementation. With CfE in place for over a decade, system leaders with stakeholders should adopt a more stable and structured approach to involvement. For instance, and in keeping with Recommendation 3.4 made below about review cycles, opportunities for stakeholder involvement could be built within an overarching review cycle, which could help make stakeholders' input more impactful.

Successful involvement requires clarity of purpose and an engagement design that reflects this purpose. Stakeholders can be involved in a myriad of objectives, ranging from information and consultation, to ongoing involvement, collaboration and empowerment, each a strong tool for both public decision makers and stakeholders, but only if chosen and designed in alignment with the purpose of engagement. For instance, one of the conclusions from Chapter 2 is to review the Senior Phase to align it with CfE ambitions. With this goal in mind, system leaders could design a large-scale review process with the goal to co-design a Senior Phase that would align with CfE ambitions. This would include at least two parts of engagement: a national consultation with the public on what they believe should be the purpose and structure of such a Senior Phase; and a series of working groups mixing (for instance) learners, teachers, school leaders, university recruitment officers and professors, employers and scholars specialised in curriculum, assessment and upper-secondary education.

The example of Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment review proposed in Chapter 3 (Box 3.2) could serve as inspiration, although Scotland would need to design its own approach. Alongside this, the approach taken by other countries to involve students' voices in the curriculum review process could also be considered. For instance, Finland consulted with its student population before re-designing its curriculum through a survey to which 60 000 students from lower- and upper-secondary education responded and through other channels for students from primary schools. This information helped ensure that Finland's re-designed curriculum reflects students' needs and that students feel engaged as agents of their own learning (OECD, 2020^[3]).

Second, system leaders should also fulfil the promise of genuine stakeholder engagement and let stakeholders' feedback, insight, and contributions to collaborative endeavour influence decision making in a transparent way. In keeping with the hypothetical example of a Senior Phase review, this would imply drawing concrete orientations from the national consultation, which would guide the working groups and the resulting Senior Phase renewal. A way to encourage stakeholders and reassure them of the genuine nature of their engagement is to explain ahead of time how their input will be used, with some degree of details, and then respect this involvement contract when the time comes to use their contributions for decision making.

2.2. Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE

Scotland's system leaders and stakeholders could revise the current allocation of responsibility for CfE, including responsibilities for its strategic direction, its reviews and updates, and the response to schools' needs for support with curriculum issues. To fulfil Scotland's commitment to shared ownership of CfE, system leaders and stakeholders need to clarify the division of responsibilities and to maintain it over time.

There are many different structures for curriculum policy and implementation across education systems, given the wide range of governance and institutional arrangements. Effective structures are transparent, with a clear and delineated remit, and persist over time (including through election cycles). They establish trust with stakeholders through high-quality and sustained engagement.

What does a clear division of CfE responsibilities imply? First, system leaders and stakeholders need to spell out the roles and related responsibilities that CfE calls for. This implies considering questions about key components of CfE such as:

- Who is in charge of CfE’s strategic orientations and coherence?
- Who is responsible for reviewing the CfE framework and keeping its key components up to date with research and societal developments?
- Who takes charge of providing schools and practitioners with the support they need to design and enact their curriculum?
- Who holds responsibility for offering diversified learning experiences to learners?

Currently, responses to these questions vary too widely across Scotland.

Second, duplication of responsibilities should be avoided when feasible, which could lead to the redistribution of some responsibilities to one entity or to the merging of some committees whose mandates and membership might be duplicated. In some instances, some overlap between responsibilities is unavoidable. In these cases, overlap should be minimised and structured, by specifying levels or areas of responsibilities and relationships between the various stakeholders involved. In other cases, there might be gaps in the responsibility structure, or the current responsibility holder is not the most adequate to continue supporting or implementing CfE.

Third, stakeholders who hold responsibilities should have matching capacity and resources. On several occasions, it was made clear to the OECD team that duplication of responsibilities sometimes happens because the agency or institution with the official mandate for an aspect of CfE does not have the capacity, resources or ability to fulfil its responsibilities. Once clarified, individual responsibilities must also be considered in relation to each other, and highlight what stakeholders need from others in order to fulfil their responsibility. Once an effective division of responsibilities has been clarified and possible changes have been agreed upon with stakeholders, the responsibility structure should remain unchanged for a number of years.

2.3. Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE

System leaders should develop a communication strategy about CfE and collaborate with practitioners, scholars and other CfE stakeholders as they do so. The purpose of CfE communication is no longer, after more than a decade, to convince people to adopt a new policy. However, the policy and its implementation processes can evolve, and these evolutions need to be communicated effectively. The first step will be for system leaders to develop a strategic approach to CfE communication, planning the necessary official communications, events and other publications ahead of time and aligned with CfE developments. In this, Recommendation 3.4, proposed below, on creating structured review cycles, goes hand in hand with a more strategic approach to communication. In the case of Scotland, an effective communication strategy would offer clear messages that are simple to understand and based on educational evidence; and be coherent throughout the system, even if it involves different actors.

To be effective, communication around CfE require sharper messages and more accessible language. When developing this communication, system leaders should sustain a dialogue with the profession and key stakeholders about the language of CfE, clarifying or doing away with “technical jargon”, and agreeing on the definition of terms and revising the existing documentation through this lens. The effectiveness of the communication strategy also relies on selecting an appropriate medium and language to engage with

stakeholders, as the trust vested in the communicator affects how the received information will be interpreted (Gouédard et al., 2020^[8]). This implies producing only those documents and communications that are necessary to the understanding of new initiatives, for instance.

Recommendation 3. Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change

3.1. Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level

Scotland has made considerable progress in enhancing the quality of school leadership and in professional learning across the school system. Supporting a curriculum as ambitious as CfE into the future, and ensuring that all learners engage in and benefit from high-quality learning experiences will require sustained support for school personnel. Other recommendations in this section will be relevant in that context; better alignment and transitions and a more coherent policy environment should make for a less bureaucratic and more streamlined system for all and give school leaders more time to lead curriculum making in their own schools. While teacher workload was not raised in discussions with the OECD team, teacher time was. In that context, in support of the next phase of development of CfE, the OECD team recommends the provision of additional, dedicated and ring-fenced time for all teachers, for curriculum planning, for monitoring of student achievement and in support of moderation of assessment outcomes.

Of note, Scotland's teachers have one of the highest rates of class contact across OECD countries. There is an obvious tension between this comparatively high rate of class contact and the expectations of CfE that teachers lead and plan curriculum locally. There are several alternatives to provide this dedicated time to teachers. Some countries, like Ireland, have reduced class contact time. Each teacher involved in curriculum planning, monitoring student achievement and moderating assessment outcomes had their class contact time reduced by 22 hours across the school year, with one additional hour per week allocated to moderation. To avoid difficulties with the provision of supply cover, an additional 670 full-time posts were allocated to the secondary sector to support that policy decision. An additional two hours were allocated on a rotating basis to teachers leading moderation processes.

Reducing class contact time in any school system makes sense only when the teaching workforce is already well qualified and has demonstrated capacity for innovation and collaboration, and when school leadership has the capacity to ensure that this scale of investment delivers improvement for learners. Another strategy could be to build upon the additional funding for teacher recruitment provided by the Scottish Government in 2020 and reserve some of the resulting additional teaching time to curriculum planning, monitoring student achievement and moderation.

3.2. Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence

Scotland should consider policy and institutional simplification, including ending or combining some policy initiatives and strategic frameworks around CfE. The system shocks caused by the current pandemic provide an opportunity for simplification and consolidation so that the efforts of school and system leadership can be re-focused on student learning, which is at the heart of CfE. This simplification should extend to institutions and agencies in the education policy system in Scotland. The OECD team is conscious that many of the agencies and organisations working across education in Scotland are themselves the products of reviews or consultation processes or consequences of public sector funding challenges. However, the team believes that a tipping point has now been reached. There is a risk that some previous structural changes to support the implementation of CfE may now be a barrier to its future development. It is possible to sustain stakeholder engagement and support, and strong deliberative processes while at the same time having fewer organisations and perhaps fewer but more focused and meaningful consultation processes.

Given the high international profile of Scotland in curriculum innovation policy and research, and the need to establish clear ownership for CfE, consideration should be given to a specialist stand-alone agency

responsible for curriculum (and perhaps assessment) in the future. Aware that this was a situation that existed historically in Scotland, the OECD team believes that the complexities of contemporary and future curriculum, especially as envisaged in CfE, need dedicated support and ownership. The remit for an agency of this kind could include in the short term:

- updating the skills, knowledge and attitudes in the CfE framework to take account of recent and future developments, such as the OECD's Learning Compass, for example.
- identifying and articulating the balance of 21st century knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with each level that gives those moving to the next level the opportunity for successful progression and subsequent success in learning.
- communicating the future direction of CfE to all stakeholders, as suggested in Recommendation 2.3.
- contributing to (or leading, depending on the outcome of the assessment review) the next stage of the development of national assessment in Scotland, aligned with CfE.

In the medium to longer term, this agency would be responsible for the ongoing monitoring of the most effective balance between flexibility and prescription and between personalisation and equity. Engaging with international networks to ensure that Scotland's curriculum is benchmarked against international development on an ongoing basis and commissioning research in support of both of these goals would also be part of the remit of this agency. A key task for this agency would need to be to periodically review CfE and its different areas of learning to ensure they are up to date to prepare students for the future.

Revisiting CfE's vision and implementation will also imply some work related to institutional responsibilities for inspection. Historically associated with innovation in school evaluation, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in Scotland has influenced the development of inspection in a number of school systems. A refreshed Inspectorate could focus on:

- advising on, or commissioning research in and with schools, to inform school monitoring and evaluation, and system intelligence on student attainment and school quality – all of which could be used in a cycle of curriculum reform (see below)
- building on current strengths in peer and self-evaluation for schools that includes CfE implementation at the school level
- developing strategic distance from other organisations and agencies supporting schools that gives stakeholders, the public and the political system confidence in its independence and rigour.

As a national agency, an Inspectorate is a key policy tool for consistency and comparability across federated or devolved systems. This is an important consideration for Scotland, where the Inspectorate is currently part of Education Scotland. The need for greater assurance that national aspirations were being delivered for all children and young people was clearly evident in discussions with the OECD review team. Other education systems, such as Ireland and the Netherlands, have their Inspectorate as part of the ministry but with statutory independence and a clear regulatory and evaluation remit.

3.3. Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of Building the Curriculum 5

Aligning qualifications, system evaluation and curriculum to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5* is essential. Scotland could first identify and develop approaches to student assessment that could be used in school and external settings at Senior Phase levels, in alignment with the four capacities and CfE philosophy. Second, Scotland could re-develop a sample-based evaluation system to collect robust and reliable data necessary to support curriculum reviews and decision making. Actions in two areas are needed to support the assessment framework outlined in 2011. The first concerns qualifications

in the Senior Phase. The second concerns the commitment to ongoing monitoring of local and national progress and achievement.

The commitment made in *Building the Curriculum 5* that the review of qualifications would align with CfE has not been delivered to date. For the secondary sector, in particular, the consequent absence of alignment between curriculum and assessment is the single biggest barrier to the implementation of CfE. The OECD team found complete consensus on this issue, but no enthusiasm for a root and branch review of qualifications, given the disruption to the system that would follow, and no agreement as to what a qualification system aligned with CfE would look like. The contestations in the past around the development of the qualifications as part of the CfE reforms, including difficulties with unit-level assessment and the impact on teacher workload of the quality assurance measures, remain unresolved. As time passes, these unresolved issues have become increasingly problematic for the system. The OECD team was struck by the lack of reference to the National 4 and 5 qualifications in discussions with stakeholders about assessment in the Senior Phase.

Developments in the arrangements for qualifications that allow students to access a wider variety of courses and learning opportunities either within schools, from local colleges or with other local partners were strengthened with the DYW in 2014. That all students can have access to broad learning opportunities, even alongside more coursework for academic studies, supports CfE's emphasis on personalised learning. This development was generally viewed as positive, although some stakeholders expressed a concern that the complexity of the qualifications offering in the Senior Phase was difficult to explain to parents and learners.

However, the emergency measures that have had to be introduced in response to COVID-19 may provide some possibilities for development in the short term that could be the basis for longer-term change. A key question that would require some consideration would be whether the agency responsible for curriculum proposed above should also be responsible for assessment design for learners from ages 3 to 18. A separate body might be responsible for the regulation and quality of qualifications, currently part of the remit of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, but the development work would be undertaken alongside the development of the curriculum.

While this OECD report does not tackle in-depth the development of student assessment, a separate working paper will outline Scotland's challenges and options to enhance student assessment and qualifications. The working paper aims to inform deliberations on how to move forward with assessment and qualifications in the Senior Phase in the future, based on a comparative perspective of student assessments. A summary of its initial findings is provided here to inform this recommendation (Stobart, forthcoming^[9]):

- There may be alternatives for recognising the range of achievement at the end of compulsory education to the current approach of examination certificates for subjects passed. A school profile is already in use, prepared by the school at the end of Senior 3, which could be continued into S4 and developed, for instance, into a school graduation certificate at 16. For the majority of students who stay on into post-compulsory education, the Higher, Advanced Higher and other qualifications' results would be used in selection and progression processes.
- The demands of the examination system attract criticism from students and educationalists. There is debate about whether the assessments at S4, S5 and S6 should be seen as a step-by-step "ladder" of qualifications up which students progress, or whether students should simply take a single "exit" examination at the appropriate level (for example, National 4 for school leavers; Highers for Higher Education; Advanced Highers for university entrance both inside and outside Scotland).
- A broader approach to external student assessment would allow SQA to explore a wider range of assessment options, including more use of information technology to provide online examination resources and more interactive approaches; opportunities for candidates to use computers to

respond; incorporation of ePortfolio and personal projects for external marking; more use of oral presentations and practicals as a way to broaden the assessment formats. Approaches allowing for fuller alignment with 21st century curricula, as in CfE, include:

- a more central role for continuous teacher assessment during the course, based on classwork and school-based tests
- teacher set and marked work that is externally moderated by other teachers
- externally marked projects and extended essays
- oral and practical presentations.
- As evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, these approaches also offer greater resilience where there is a major disruption. Adoption may require Scotland to further decentralise some of its assessment procedures while further developing teachers' assessment literacy in order to expand the professional capacity of schools in assessment.

None of these recommendations requires any immediate change for schools or for SQA. In the short term, it would be business as usual in the Senior Phase. However, the setting of a timeframe for change and the generation of an evidence base, together with some of the structural changes proposed in organisations and agencies, would signal the policy direction and generate an evidence base to inform any changes.

A number of initiatives have been put in place to support the ongoing monitoring of student achievement since the introduction of CfE. Reporting on the levels has its limitations, given that they were designed to support teacher planning and judgement and not to measure national progress. Small changes in data of this kind cannot give the system the intelligence it needs to monitor the achievement of particular groups of students within the cohort. Similarly, while the census-based assessments (SNSA) are underway, the purpose and usefulness of these are already being questioned. Designed to provide data to support teacher judgement and information for system monitoring, it is questionable whether census-based assessments of this kind can serve both purposes well. The Framework for Assessment is ambitious on the kinds of monitoring needed to support CfE over time. Three priorities are identified for the range of information needed: information to support an account of success at local and national levels; information that describes progress and achievement against standards and expectations; and a particular focus on supporting points of transition in the system.

The OECD team believes that there is now an urgent need for robust, reliable data to support these priorities and support wider policy and decision making, as well as the curriculum review cycle discussed below. Previous attempts at this kind of sample monitoring were not successful for a range of reasons: the tests that the SQA administered provided data only at the national level; they were administratively complex and expensive; and time-consuming for schools to administer. The experiences of other systems in recent years in building these sample-based systems that make very little demands on teachers and schools but provide extremely useful information can inform the deliberations in Scotland. These long-term monitoring arrangements allow for particular focus on under-achieving groups within the population and give rise to a dataset that can be made available to independent researchers for additional data mining and research. The arrangements in Ireland are noteworthy for their longevity and how the data continue to be used by a wide range of agencies, notably, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in its review processes (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Monitoring student achievement over time in Ireland

The long-established National Assessment of Mathematics and Reading Skills (NAMER), running in Ireland since 1972, has consistently provided data to the Irish system that has informed key decisions on a wide variety of policy priorities, such as closing the gap in literacy and numeracy attainment in high

poverty schools, Irish-medium education, and the new language curriculum for primary schools. Data have been used to show the impact of initiatives and to modify and refocus as needed.

Sample-based monitoring systems of this kind require a long-term commitment and sustainable funding, as they need to outlive governments.

Source: Educational Research Centre (2021^[10]), "National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER)", <https://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/national-assessments> [accessed on 22 March 2021].

In commissioning a programme of independent research on the impact of CfE, Scotland should consider a longitudinal cohort study, of one or both phases of the system, with a focus on the student experience of curriculum and assessment, student achievement, student engagement with learning, subject choice and equality of outcomes for a representative sample of students across different kinds of schools. Tracking the impact of curriculum review and proposed assessment changes through such a study would provide rich data to inform ongoing review and evaluation and important information on the differential impact of changes on particular groups of learners.

3.4. Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review

Scotland could consider establishing a systematic curriculum review cycle with a planned timeframe and specific review agenda, led by the specialist stand-alone agency proposed in Recommendation 3.2. Data collected through ongoing monitoring, together with independent research and intelligence from the HMIE's inspection of education, can inform cycles that address particular aspects of CfE within a planned and specified timeframe. Such a planned and systemic approach to review might serve Scotland well, given the level of public interest in education. An agreed systematic approach would also reduce reliance on external independent reviews when controversies arise and build internal capacity for curriculum monitoring. A review cycle might also reduce the need for ongoing guidance and clarifications and give the system greater stability overall. The energy of leaders could be redirected to focus on the implementation of CfE in their schools rather than responding to the most recent update or clarification. A review cycle would support CfE in coherence with the earlier Recommendation 3.2 about granting curriculum leadership and development responsibilities to a stand-alone agency.

Moving in this direction needs to be carefully planned, as it is likely to require some organisational re-structuring so that it is clear to the system – and to the wider public – which organisation is responsible and accountable for the processes and quality of the review and the speedy implementation of the recommendations. In general, systems with specialist curriculum units or organisations assign the review responsibilities to the same agency, with some distance between the work of the review and central government to allow for clear lines of reporting and responsibility. – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland, for example, and the Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority. In both cases, the central government can request a review of a specific area, independently of the agreed cycle. This allows for urgent issues to be responded to quickly by a minister or council of ministers acting in the public interest without embroiling the political system in the details of a curriculum controversy.

Such a systematic, more apolitical approach is well suited to a system such as Scotland's, where there is a high level of interest in education.

Recommendation 4. Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view

Building on the system's existing strengths, Scotland should consider how to take on board the recommendations in this report as a coherent package rather than individual policy actions for shaping the

next steps. Leading the change process itself will require reinforcing the stability, trustworthiness and effectiveness of the decision-making processes, especially to define the next steps of CfE: what needs to be done, by whom, when and how it will be measured. On this last point, Scotland should consider setting up the metrics needed to understand progress with implementing CfE actions over the long run.

This will provide a platform for effective and sustained implementation and review of the change process and how it is actually reaching its objectives to help all learners achieve excellence. Scotland can adopt a structured and long-term approach to the ongoing implementation of CfE, which builds on the strengths of the system and the policy to tackle its challenges. The continued efforts made throughout Scotland to develop and improve CfE are a testament to the system's long-term commitment to educational quality. The effectiveness of these efforts has been lessened, however, by their ad hoc nature and the difficulties in sustaining their coherence in the absence of a structured approach to implementation.

Planning a structured and long-term approach to CfE implementation from a central government perspective will help reinforce the policy's internal coherence (the design and eventual review of its many building blocks) and its external coherence with other education policies. Paired with collaborative ownership of the policy, it will offer better guarantees for the sustainability of Curriculum for Excellence. In practice, the approach to CfE's ongoing implementation can be better structured by systematically specifying the actions that need to be taken for a given development of CfE; clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each actor; agreeing with key stakeholders on a timeline; and allocating the resources necessary for completion of the actions.

Adopting a long-term focus with CfE means thinking several years down the line and keeping abreast of the emerging trends that affect education in a way that nurtures student learning and experience in Scotland. A long-term focus in the approach to CfE's ongoing implementation avoids the trap of piecemeal policy making, and concentrates efforts on the initiatives that serve students and their learning, and reinforces the sustainability of the education system.

This report provides a set of recommendations that can be weaved together and considered for this structured approach to the future of CfE. Each recommendation points to a number of actions that should be taken to strengthen CfE and tackle its ongoing implementation challenges. However, they need to be considered as a coherent package rather than as individual policy actions. A structured approach to CfE implementation, building on the system's existing strengths and this report's recommendations, can help Scotland not only tackle ongoing or future challenges for CfE but also provide a platform for effective and sustained review of the change process and how it is reaching its objectives to help all learners achieve excellence.

The OECD team proposes that Scotland reviews the recommendations through an actionable lens, provided in Table 5.2, and suggests the following action plan:

1. Start by re-assessing the vision of CfE to take on board social and economic developments, emerging trends in education and up-to-date research (Recommendation 1.1).
2. Define the indicators that can support progress with the implementation and impact of CfE (Recommendations 1.1 and 1.4) and establish a communication strategy that can be updated to support CfE's developments (Recommendation 2.3).
3. Revise the roles and responsibilities of those stakeholders involved in CfE (Recommendation 2.2). This will include defining the concrete role of the institution that should take the main responsibility for CfE (Recommendation 3.2). This institution can then establish a systematic approach to curriculum review (Recommendation 3.4) and set up consultations to explore a range of issues raised in this assessment: the balance of knowledge across the different stages of CfE (Recommendation 1.2), between breadth and depth of learning (Recommendation 1.3).
4. Work on developing the approach to stakeholder engagement with CfE ensuring stability, purpose and impact (Recommendation 2.1).

5. Work with SQA and other related institutions, including consultations, to consolidate an assessment system that aligns with the CfE vision and student learning needs (Recommendation 3.3).
6. In parallel, discussions on teacher and school leadership time and professional development needs may be organised by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland (Recommendation 3.1).

Table 5.2. Planning next steps for Curriculum for Excellence

Recommendations	Concrete actions	Indicators to review progress	Who is in charge?	Resources	When?
1. Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from 3 to 18 years					
1.1. Re-assess CfE's aspirational vision against emerging trends in education					
1.2. Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE					
1.3. Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE					
1.4. Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research					
2. Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities					
2.1. Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE					
2.2. Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE					
2.3. Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE					
3. Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change					
3.1. Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level					
3.2. Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence					
3.3. Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of <i>Building the Curriculum 5</i>					
3.4. Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review					
4. Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view					

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Annex A. OECD assessment team members

The following team of OECD and external experts was assembled specifically for the implementation assessment of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE):

Dr Beatriz Pont is a Senior Education Policy Analyst at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. She leads the OECD Education Policy Implementation team. She has extensive international experience in education policy reform in areas including equity and quality in education, school leadership, adult learning and adult skills. She has worked with countries and jurisdictions, such as Mexico, Norway, Sweden and Wales (United Kingdom), in their school improvement reform efforts. Beatriz holds a PhD from the Complutense University, Madrid and an honorary doctorate from Sheffield Hallam University. She studied Political Science at Pitzer College and holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Columbia University. She has been a research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences (Tokyo University) and the Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies (LIEPP, Sciences Po, Paris). She was previously a researcher on education and social policies in the Economic and Social Council of the Government of Spain.

Romane Viennet is a Policy Analyst with the OECD Policy Advice and Implementation division at the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills. She co-ordinated the OECD implementation assessment of Scotland's CfE and has previously taken part in similar OECD assessments of school education policies in Ireland, Mexico, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom). She holds a Master's degree in International Affairs and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Economics, both from Sciences Po, Paris. She has worked previously as a social impact analyst in France and as a research assistant in behavioural economics projects at Cornell University, New York. Her research interests include education policy implementation and change processes in public policy.

Professor Anne Looney is the Executive Dean of Dublin City University's Institute of Education, Ireland's largest faculty of education. From 2001 until 2016, she was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the agency responsible for curriculum and assessment for early years, primary and post-primary education in Ireland. She also held the position of Interim CEO at the Higher Education Authority until March 2017. She completed her doctoral studies at the Institute of Education in London. In 2014/2015, she was Professorial Research Fellow at the Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, based at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane. Her current research interests include assessment policy and practice, curriculum, teacher identity and professional standards for teachers and teaching. She has also published on religious, moral and civic education, and education policy. She has been a team member for reviews for the OECD on school quality and assessment systems, and is the current president of the International Professional Development Association.

Professor Jan van den Akker is Professor Emeritus at the University of Twente (the Netherlands), where he held a Chair on Curriculum Design and Implementation for many years. Moreover, from 2005 until 2016, he was Director-General of SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development), overseeing all curriculum developments in primary and secondary education. Since 2016, he has been acting as an independent curriculum researcher and consultant, building on very broad international experiences in dozens of countries and including various visiting professorships (most recently at the Humboldt University in Berlin). Jan's main areas of expertise include: curriculum policy making (in comparative perspective); curriculum development, in interaction with teacher learning and school development; and methodology of design research in education.

Annex B. Schedule of the OECD visits to Scotland (United Kingdom)

The project ran from July 2020 to April 2021 and was thus subject to travel restrictions imposed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic that occurred during that time. As a result, all visits and interviews were conducted online.

Table B.1. First fact-finding virtual visit to Scotland (28 September-2 October 2020)

Date and time (GMT)	Activity/stakeholder
Monday, 28 September 2020 09:00-10:10	Scottish Education Council Representatives Local Authority Director of Education and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead Educational Institute of Scotland School Leaders Scotland General Teaching Council Scotland National Parent Forum Scotland Scottish Qualifications Authority
10:30 -11:15	Scottish Practitioner Forum Representatives
11:30-12:40	Scottish Government Learning Directorate Officials Director of Learning Deputy Director, Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Deputy Director Improvement, Attainment and Well-being OECD Review National Co-ordinator and Senior Phase Policy Lead
13:40-14:50	Scottish Qualifications Authority Chief Executive Director of Qualifications Development
15:10-16:20	Employers Vice Chair of the Employer's Forum Co-Chair of Glasgow Developing Young Workforce Regional Group
Tuesday, 29 September 2020 10:00-11:10	College Representatives Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland Chief Executive, College Development Network Deputy Director of Skills and Economic Recovery, Scottish Funding Council
11:30-13:00	Local Authorities Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Fife Council and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, South East Alliance Deputy Chief Executive and Director of People, South Ayrshire and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, South West Collaborative Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Perth and Kinross and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, Tayside Collaborative Director of Children's Services, Shetland and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, Northern Alliance Lead Officer for Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative Director of Education, East Renfrewshire and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, The West Partnership Director of Children's Services, Renfrewshire Council

Date and time (GMT)	Activity/stakeholder
14:00-15:10	Education Scotland Chief Executive Strategic Director, Lifelong Learning Head of Curriculum Innovation Strategic Director for Scrutiny
15:20-16:20	National Agencies (Skills) Director of Critical Skills and Occupations, Skills Development Scotland Director of Career Information Advice and Guidance, Skills Development Scotland Chief Executive, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
Wednesday, 30 September 2020 10:00-10:40	Community Learning and Development and Youthwork Representatives Chief Executive, Youthlink Scotland Chair of Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland
10:50-11:30	Scottish Attainment Challenge/Additional Support Needs Representatives Senior Regional Advisor, Education Scotland Chair of Additional Support for Learning Advisory Group
11:50-13:00	Teacher Professional Learning and Leadership Representatives Chief Executive, General Teaching Council Scotland Director of Education, Registration and Professional Learning Head of Professional Learning and Leadership, Education Scotland Executive Director of Education, Glasgow
14:00-15:10	Higher Education Representatives Chair of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education and University of Aberdeen Chair of Universities Scotland's Admissions Policy Group Member of the Commission for Widening Access: Access Delivery Group
15:20-16:30	Education Researchers Dr Keir Bloomer, Royal Society of Edinburgh, Education Committee Prof Louise Hayward, Professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation, University of Glasgow Prof Kay Livingston, University of Glasgow Dr Nicola Carse, Edinburgh University and Chair of Scottish Educational Research Association
Thursday, 1 October 2020 10:00-11:10	Headteacher and Teacher Professional Bodies, Unions and Working Groups (1/2) Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland Headteacher Royal High School and Chair of the BOCSS Group
11:30-12:40	Headteacher and Teacher Professional Bodies, Unions and Working Groups (2/2) General Secretary, Educational Institute of Scotland General Secretary, Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association National Official (Scotland), NASUWT (Scotland) General Secretary, School Leaders Scotland
13:40-14:40	Parent Organisations Chief Executive Officer, Connect Vice Chair, National Parent Forum Scotland
15:00-16:00	Learners and Young Person Organisations Smart Services Director, Young Scot Joint Head of Children's Parliament Chief Executive of Children in Scotland Chief Executive of the Scottish Youth Parliament
Friday, 2 October 2020 10:00-11:30	Curriculum and Assessment Board Headteacher, Harrismuir Learning Community, West Lothian Head of Humanities, Care and Services, Scottish Qualifications Authority University of Stirling Renfrewshire Council Chair of the ADES Curriculum Network Chief Executive Education Scotland Strategic Director, Lifelong Learning, Education Scotland Chief Executive Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Chair National Parent Forum Scotland Locality Manager, Clydesdale South Lanarkshire Council, Education Resources Assistant Secretary the Educational Institute of Scotland Senior Director of Service Development and Delivery, Skills Development Scotland

Date and time (GMT)	Activity/stakeholder
	Director of Service Design and Innovation Skills Development Scotland National Executive Member, NASUWT Scotland Director Scottish Council of Independent Schools Assistant General Secretary Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association Deputy Associate Principal, University of Strathclyde
11:45-13:00	Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee Clare Adamson MSP (Convener) Daniel Johnson MSP (Deputy Convener) Alasdair Allan MSP Kenneth Gibson MSP Iain Gray MSP Jamie Greene MSP Ross Greer MSP Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP Rona Mackay MSP Beatrice Wishart MSP Five Parliament officials
14:00-15:00	Gaelic Education Groups Director of Education, Bòrd na Gàidhlig Chair, Stòrlann Nàiseanta Parental Officer, Comann nam Pàrant Chief Executive, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
15:20-16:20	Subject-Specific Interest Groups Arts and Learning Manager, Edinburgh City Council Senior Education Officer for Health and Well-being, Education Scotland Chair, Scottish Association of Language Teachers ADES Representative, National Profile Raising Group Senior Education Officer for Religious and Moral Education STEM Representative, Institute of Physics Representative from Royal Geographical Society of Scotland Representative from Technology Teachers Association

Table B.2. Second fact-finding virtual visit to Scotland (2-5 November 2020)

Date and time (GMT)	Activity/stakeholder
Monday, 2 November 2020 09:30-10:45	Meeting with Colleges, Employers and Community Learning and Development Representatives Principal, Forth Valley College Principal and Chief Executive, West Highland College (University of the Highlands and Islands) Community Benefit Co-ordinator, CCG Construction Group HR Manager, CCG Construction Group Community Learning and Development, Curriculum Lead, KEAR Campus School
13.00-16.10 13:00-13:30 13:40-14:10 14:20-14:50 15:00-15:30 15:40-16.10	Virtual Visit to Forehill Primary School, South Ayrshire, including meetings with Headteacher and Senior Management Team Teachers Primary 6 Learners Primary 7 Learners Parent Group
Tuesday, 3 November 09:30-12:30 09:30-10:00 10:10-10:40 10:50-11:20 11:30-12:00 12:10-12:40	Virtual visit to Tiree High School and Oban High School, including meetings with Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team Teachers Parents' Council Broad General Education Learners Senior Phase Learners
13:30-14:45	Focus Group Meeting with National Parents Organisations Parents nominated by National Parent Forum Scotland and Connect
Wednesday, 4 November 09:30-12:30 09:30-10:00 10:10-10:40 10:50-11:20 11:30-12:00 12:10-12:40	Virtual Visit to Castlemilk High School, Glasgow, including meetings with Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team Teachers Parent Group Broad General Education Learners Senior Phase Learners
13:30-14:45	Focus Group Meeting with School-age Learners from Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire Grove Academy, Dundee Stewarton Academy, East Ayrshire
15:00-16:30	Focus Group Meeting with Headteachers from Newbattle High School, Midlothian Portlethen Academy, Aberdeenshire Duncanrig Secondary School, South Lanarkshire Hazelhead Primary School, Aberdeen E-Sgoil
Thursday, 5 November 2020 09:00-12:10 09:00-09:30 09:40-10:10 10:20-10:50 10:50-11:20 11:30-12:00	Virtual Visit to Aberdeen Grammar School, including meetings with Headteacher and Senior Management Team Broad General Education Learners Parents Teachers Senior Phase Learners
13:00-14:15	Focus Group Meeting with Teachers from Belmont Academy, South Ayrshire Earlston High School, Scottish Borders Hillhead High School Glasgow Inveralmond Community High School Grange Primary, Angus Gartocharn Primary, West Dunbartonshire Principal Teacher and Pedagogy Group Lead, West Lothian Inclusion Service Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire

14:30-15:45	Focus Group Meeting with Post-school Learners 4 university students 2 college students 2 post-school learners involved in youth work
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Table B.3. Additional meetings (2020)

Date and time (GMT)	Activity/stakeholder
Tuesday, 13 October 16:30-17:30	Professor Mark Priestley, University of Stirling
Friday, 13 November 10:00-11:00	Professor Chris Chapman, University of Glasgow
Tuesday, 24 November 17:00-18:00	Professor Graham Donaldson, University of Glasgow
Monday, 30 November 15:30-16:30	Professor Andrew Hargreaves

Table B.4. Stakeholder consultation event to discuss OECD preliminary findings (16 March 2021)

Time (GMT)	Activity
12:45-13:00	Signing up to the online event
13:00-13:05	Welcome
13:05-13:30	Preliminary Draft Findings and Recommendations
13:30-13:50	Questions and Answers with the Participants
13:50-14:20	Working Session #1
14:30-15:00	Working Session #2
15:00-15:30	Plenary Session and Wrap-up

Implementing Education Policies

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence

INTO THE FUTURE

Students in Scotland (United Kingdom) engage in learning through *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), which aims to provide them with a holistic, coherent, and future-oriented approach to learning between the ages of 3 and 18. CfE offers an inspiring and widely supported philosophy of education. Schools design their own curriculum based on a common framework which allows for effective curricular practices. In 2020, Scotland invited the OECD to assess the implementation of CfE in primary and secondary schools to understand how school curricula have been designed and implemented in recent years. This report analyses the progress made with CfE since 2015, building upon several months of observations in Scotland, the existing literature and experiences from other OECD countries. The OECD analysis and recommendations aim to support Scotland as it further enhances CfE to achieve its potential for the present and future of its learners. Just as Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* was among the pioneers of 21st century learning, its most recent developments hold valuable lessons for other education systems and their own curriculum policies.



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Upper-secondary education
student assessment
in Scotland: A comparative
perspective

Gordon Stobart

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DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Cancels & replaces the same document of 27 August 2021

**UPPER-SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN
SCOTLAND: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

OECD Education Working Paper No. 253

Gordon Stobart, Emeritus Professor of Education, University College London and Honorary Research Fellow at the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment (OUCEA).

This working paper has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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This working paper has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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Abstract

Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) is a pioneering example of 21st century curriculum reform. With Scotland positioned within the historic British examination tradition, qualifications for upper-secondary school students have seen far less reform. The cancellations of examinations in 2020-21, and the crises these generated, have provided an opportunity to reconsider the upper-secondary assessment system. This paper compares the Scottish system to five other legacy traditions, as well as four other British legacy systems, to offer insight for how Scotland could further improve the alignment between CfE and upper-secondary assessments. The analysis is guided further by theoretical considerations on what constitutes a dependable and trustworthy assessment system, to refine the reflection around possible options for the Scottish system. Three major themes emerge from this comparative review. One focuses on how the external assessments could be more innovative in order to capture a wider range of student capabilities. The second is to rethink the role of teacher assessment, with more emphasis placed on continuous school-based assessment. The third is to better integrate the academic and vocational strands with the assessment system which, given SQA's responsibilities for both, would offer a broader range of curriculum options.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this working paper is to examine the opportunities for *constructive alignment* (Biggs and Collis, 1982^[1]) between forward-looking curricula such as *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) in Scotland, United Kingdom, the accompanying pedagogy, and their assessment in the upper-secondary education (ISCED 3). The paper complements the broader OECD Review of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (2021). The review noted the powerful influence of the secondary school assessment system on the curriculum and on pedagogy, which warranted a further study. The paper considers whether, and how, comparative assessment systems are adapting to these broader educational aspirations.

Nine systems are drawn upon which are relevant for Scotland's upper-secondary assessment system (secondary years S4-S6). This relevance is either in terms of family resemblances (England (United Kingdom), henceforth referred to as "England"; Hong Kong, China; Ireland; Wales (United Kingdom), henceforth referred to as "Wales") or through instructive differences (France; New Zealand; Norway; Ontario (Canada) henceforth referred to as "Ontario"; Queensland (Australia), henceforth referred to as "Queensland").

The assumption underlying this paper is that student assessment systems are essentially a social, rather than scientific, process which reflects the history and culture within which they occur (Stobart, 2008^[2]). These traditions are socially embedded and any reforms may well be opposed by both the public and policy makers. Scotland is located within the British tradition of school examinations with its emphasis on single subject end-of-course external examinations, while other systems reveal different origins and traditions. These range from the devolved and teacher led Nordic traditions to the centralised French system. The American system is another devolved system, with college entrance based on a wide range of evidence.

As cultures and education systems change, so upper-secondary assessment may have to change. For example, education systems have been moving towards so-called 21st century curricula focused on student capabilities and competencies (OECD, 2019^[3]); staying-on rates after the end of compulsory schooling have increased; and the student population has been growing more diverse. These transformations may involve, among others, technical innovations and developments in school-based assessments.

Assessment reforms may be inhibited by a number of factors, including the resistance of teachers and parents. In Ireland, opposition from teacher unions to the reform of the Junior Certificate, taken at the end of lower-secondary education (at 15-16 years old), provides a case study. Successful change requires public confidence and trust, something not easily achieved in historically embedded systems. In jurisdictions such as England, the reliance of the high-stakes school accountability system on schools' performance in national examinations limits innovative assessment formats. In systems such as in Hong Kong, China, where results are central to highly competitive university selection, the pressures to ensure comparable results limit what changes can be made.

Additionally, unanticipated events can also deeply affect student assessment systems. In 2020-2021, this is best illustrated by how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education and forced decision makers and education stakeholders to find emergency solutions to adapt or replace examinations and student assessment processes overall. Scotland and England sought to generate comparable grade distributions to previous years. In Scotland students were initially awarded grades based on teacher judgements, which were then moderated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) using a statistical algorithm. The

outcome was student and public outcry at the unfairness of individual results and a late switch back to teachers' grades for their students, emphasising the fragility of the assessment system. Other systems with a greater emphasis on school-based assessments proved more resilient. Either way, the COVID-19 stress test opened additional opportunities for jurisdictions internationally to reflect on the future of student assessment and to seek possible alternatives to their own system.

How student assessment systems balance the demands of validity, reliability and manageability is a concern for every education system (OECD, 2013^[4]), because these demands come with necessary trade-offs. This paper seeks to contribute to the reflection in Scotland and beyond, by considering several options to develop dependable assessment systems. A dependable assessment is one that can reliably give a trustworthy estimate of students' capabilities. It involves an optimal trade-off between construct validity, reliability, and manageability. Examining comparative approaches to student assessment should provide encouragement and examples for Scotland's decision makers as they consider possible directions for assessment developments, to improve alignment with *Curriculum for Excellence* and the capacities expected of students.

1.1. Methodology

This working paper was commissioned to the author as part of the OECD's work on Scotland's education system. It complements the OECD report *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future* (2021^[5]). This paper is a comparative study of upper-secondary school assessment systems with Scotland as the focal point. The comparative approach was adopted to position Scotland in relation to other systems, and to offer a range of approaches to upper-secondary school assessment that may be informative for stakeholders in Scotland. The paper is largely organised around broad themes emerging as major factors affecting student assessment, rather than by case-by-case studies of the different jurisdictions. These themes include current educational changes, historic legacies, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the integration of vocational assessment.

The selection of a sample of nine assessment systems from various traditions of student assessment was purposive, as Scotland's legacy plays a significant role in its own system's evolutions. Four of the systems are within the historic British tradition, as is Scotland. These are England, Wales, Ireland and Hong Kong, China. The intention was to consider instructive similarities and differences between them. The remaining five jurisdictions were selected to illustrate contrasting approaches to upper-secondary assessment from other traditions. These particular systems were selected for their relevance to Scotland. New Zealand and Queensland, Australia have broken away from the British model of single-subject examinations and of extensive external examinations. Norway is of similar size to Scotland and represents the Nordic tradition, which has historically put teacher-based assessment at the centre of its system. This is also the case for the province of Ontario in Canada, a high-achieving jurisdiction which represents features of the American system. Although the French Baccalauréat involves a larger student population than Scotland's, it represents another highly centralised system of examinations and has had a wide influence. Both Scotland and Wales have introduced an additional Baccalaureate qualification, and the International Baccalaureate is also a highly regarded alternative upper-secondary qualification. Of relevance to Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* is how the French system assesses the breadth of Baccalauréat curriculum.

Information on these international systems was gathered through the analysis of policy documents and research publications. Key sources include the recent international research study *Examination standards: How measures and meanings differ around the world* (Baird et al., 2018^[6]) and articles in the international journal *Assessment in Education, Principles,*

Policy and Practice. Reports from the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were also utilised, as well as the information packs containing key statistics and chronological accounts of the evolution of student assessment in upper-secondary education in Scotland provided by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and independent experts.

A series of online stakeholder meetings was organised with Scottish educationalists (including teachers, learners and other school stakeholders), policy makers and officers from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Their purpose was both fact-checking and sounding out suggested options for the current system.

1.2. Structure of the paper

The paper begins with a brief overview of the Scottish upper-secondary assessment system, which involves a complex series of examinations, pathways within them, and teaching approaches (Section 2). Section 3 considers how upper-secondary assessment systems have responded to some of the 21st century curricular reforms currently underway in jurisdictions such as Scotland, Wales, Norway, Hong Kong, China and New Zealand.

Section 4 considers the main reasons why assessment systems have been slow to adapt to these educational changes. A key element among factors inhibiting assessment reforms is that examination systems are a product of historical traditions, often with their origins in the 19th century or earlier.

Section 4 considers how the different jurisdictions managed the 2020 COVID-19 ‘stress test’ when schools closed and, in some countries, national examinations were cancelled.

This leads to considerations in Section 5 of what is needed in a dependable system and the balance of validity, reliability and manageability that is involved. This includes consideration of how Scottish students may want to be assessed, given they are the ones most directly affected by the assessment system.

Section 6 builds upon the argument and examples to consider some of the options, based on comparative analysis, that are available for the Scottish upper-secondary assessment system. It presents six options for consideration that may assist policy makers and educators in further developing an assessment system that is better aligned with *Curriculum for Excellence* and better reflects the demands of 21st century teaching and learning.

2. An overview of the Scottish assessment system

Scotland was an international leader in adopting broader ‘21st century’ capacities for education and life outside schooling. Similar aspirations are found in most of the jurisdictions reviewed. These broader educational goals have led to curriculum reform, of which Scotland’s *Curriculum for Excellence* is a pioneering example. *Curriculum for Excellence* offers a framework for education between the ages of 3 and 18, covering all cycles until upper-secondary education (referred to as “the Senior Phase” in Scotland). Where examinations are, or aim to be, curriculum-related (as opposed, for instance, to skill-based examinations), such reforms directly impact assessment systems. This is especially the case where the curriculum encourages new types of skills (such as socio-emotional and transversal skills), as well as content; and where it seeks to respond to the increasing number and diversity of the student cohort post-16 years old in terms of both cultural and academic diversity (OECD, 2020^[7]; OECD, 2010^[8]).

Wales, France, and Norway are currently rolling out such forward-looking curricula. These widespread curriculum reforms seek to encourage broader skills and capacities. To align with these, assessment systems may need to be modified, especially in those jurisdictions with traditional examinations such as New Zealand and France.

Many jurisdictions around the world found challenges in how to translate these aspirations into their upper-secondary school assessment policies. The new curriculum intentions are often hard to align with historic assessment practices that are embedded in that society. In this paper Scotland is positioned, with England, Wales, Ireland and Hong Kong, China, within the British legacy system (see Section 4.1). Upper-secondary school examinations in this system have their origins in the expanding educational systems of the 19th century. Hunter (1963^[9]) identifies three main purposes of the Scottish Certificate examinations that were introduced in 1888:

- To supplement the inspection of certain secondary-type schools;
- To establish uniform standards of attainment;
- To provide a Certificate acceptable to the universities and other examining or professional bodies. (Hunter, 1963, p. 322^[9]).

The first purpose was a temporary expedient at a time to deal with the expansion of secondary education. However, the use of examination data in evaluating school performance has continued. The role of examinations in setting and raising standards and in selection and certification is still central to their current functions.

The current National Qualifications were immediately preceded by the Standard Grade and Intermediate Grade. When introduced in the 1980s, the intention was to give all young people recognition at the end of compulsory schooling and to drive curriculum and teaching change. These changes included teacher assessments of practical and enquiry elements along with inter-disciplinary courses in science, social science and social and vocational skills. These ambitions were not fulfilled, and the teacher-assessed elements were removed as they were seen as inflating the overall grades. The Intermediates, which were introduced for those staying on in S5 (secondary year 5) but for whom Highers were not suitable were also removed, leaving the prospect of increased failure.¹

Scotland, unlike many jurisdictions, does not provide a school leaving certificate but issues subject-based qualifications. Students who have had limited success in their examinations may therefore have little to show for their school achievements. The current upper-secondary examination system in Scotland is also distinctive in having four different levels of mainstream qualifications over the three years of the upper-secondary phase (S4-6). The current system consists of the teacher assessed National Qualifications 3 and 4, and the externally examined National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. These replaced the legacy system Access 3, Standard Grade, Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher. Other qualifications are also available, with their level indicated within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), with, for example, SCQF 5 incorporating National 5.

Students prepare for qualifications throughout secondary education (see Table 2.1), and a major concern has been whether the qualification study programmes replace *Curriculum for Excellence* as the *de facto* curriculum (OECD, 2021^[5]). The new National Qualifications were introduced in 2013 in order to align more closely with *Curriculum for Excellence*. They were modular, with each unit incorporating examinations and

¹ I am grateful to Graham Donaldson for directing me towards this, and other, Scottish examination history.

teacher-assessed coursework. The assessment of each unit, along with its quality assurance demands led to an unsustainable workload for teachers and in 2016, the Scottish Government requested that the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) remove the requirement for mandatory unit assessment in the qualifications. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) required courses of 160 hours, which meant there was a reduction in the courses that could be studied and a pushback into preparation in S3.

Table 2.1. Typical secondary education study patterns in Scotland

School Phase	Ages	Curriculum phase and <i>typical qualification prepared</i>	Typical number of subjects
Secondary 1-3 (S1-3)	11-14/15 (flexible multi-level teaching in some schools)	Broad General Education	12-15
S4	14-15 /15-16	Senior Phase <i>National 4</i> (Teacher assessed) <i>National 5</i> (Exam/coursework)	6-9
S5	15-16/16-17	Senior Phase <i>Higher</i>	5
S6	16-17/17-18	Senior Phase <i>Advanced Higher</i>	2-3

Source: Scottish Government (2021_[10]) OECD Independent review of Curriculum for Excellence 2020-2021 - Initial evidence pack, and information provided by the SQA (unpublished).

The roll-out of the Revised National Qualifications began in 2017-18, with more emphasis placed on the final course examinations and a reduced contribution in teacher-assessed coursework in some subjects. The current proportions of exams and coursework in three major National Qualifications (*National 5*, *Higher* and *Advanced Higher*) can be found in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Breakdown of course assessment in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Qualifications

Qualification level	Proportion of final exam in the qualification
Number of qualifications by examination weighting	
National 5 (53)	
1	No exam
17 (inc. 1 with no exam)	Exam less than 50%
19	Exam 51-75%
16 (inc. 4 with no coursework)	Exam 76%+
Higher (41)	
0	No exam
14	Exam less than 50%
18	Exam 51-75%
9	Exam 76%+
Advanced Higher (29)	
4	No exam
9	Exam less than 50%
13	Exam 51-75%
3	Exam 76%+

Source: Information provided by the Scottish Government and SQA.

The Revised National 5 are typically taken in Secondary 4, the end of compulsory education at age 16. However, 88% of students continue into Secondary 5 where most will take Highers, the basis for most selection to Higher Education and Training. In 2018/19 26.8% of students left at this point, with 61.2% leaving after S6 (Scottish Government, 2021_[10]). Of these 19.1% of school leavers gained one pass or more at SCQF Level 7. University education in Scotland has traditionally begun at 17 years, followed by a four-year degree programme, though increasingly, students are staying on in S6 to take Advanced Highers in order to widen their access to Higher Education.

The system is made more complex by the flexibility offered to schools to prepare students for the different levels (National 4 & 5; Highers; Advanced Highers) at different rates. This may lead to multi-level teaching in the same class and different ages of entry, particularly in smaller entry schools. This is problematic in some subjects in which transition from one qualification to the next may involve additions to both the curriculum and skills.

Scotland offers a wide, and increasing, range of vocationally oriented awards, some of which are incorporated in the National Qualifications. Most awards are taken in the form of National Group Awards which, in more occupationally related areas, include National Certificates and National Progression Awards. Along with the recently introduced Foundation Apprenticeships, these can lead to more advanced study at Higher National Certificate and Diploma levels.

There is concern about how this traditional examination system aligns with *Curriculum for Excellence*. At present, there are limited comparative examples of how national examinations manage to assess broader global skills such as creativity, collaboration, and communication. For instance, Scotland and other education systems successfully participate in the Global Competence assessments of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2020_[11]), and countries such as Norway, New Zealand and Finland are currently developing approaches which offer opportunities to use more extensive online resources as part of examinations. Part of the appeal of the International Baccalaureate Diploma (see Section 4.2.4) has been the inclusion of a 1 600 word Theory of Knowledge essay (plus oral), along with an extended essay of 4 000 words and a 'Creativity, activity and service' component as part of its core requirements. These sample a much fuller range of the aspirations of the 21st century curriculum. The evidence from this paper points to those systems with a wider range of assessment approaches being better placed to both meet the demands of curriculum reform and to offer more resilience in the face of massive disruption, such as that seen in the COVID-19 pandemic.

There appears to be limited information about how students in Scotland would prefer to be assessed. The anecdotal evidence from reviews such as the Priestley (2020_[12]) and *Insight #SQAfutures* (SQA and YoungScot Observatory, 2018_[13]) is that students would prefer a system which includes some forms of continuous assessment by their teachers. Student interviews conducted by the OECD team as part of its 2021 assessment of CfE implementation also found similar attitudes from students, who valued the idea of continuous assessment by their teachers. They were also concerned about the 'teaching to the test' they were receiving in preparation for the National Qualifications. There were more positive attitudes towards the Advanced Highers as they were perceived as encouraging greater depth and creativity.

3. Student assessment systems adapting to educational change

Assessment systems are having to adapt to widespread educational and curricular reforms. Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* is a pioneering example of broader 21st century educational goals which have led to curriculum reform. Where examinations are curriculum-related, such reforms directly impact assessment systems. This is especially the case where the curriculum encourages new skills as well as content, and responds to the increasing diversity of the student cohort. Wales, France, and New Zealand and Norway are all currently rolling out new curricula. Other transformations in education also affect assessment systems, including digital and technical innovations, developments in school-based assessments, changes to the school leaving age, and increasing student diversity.

3.1. Aligning with a broader curriculum

Education is witnessing widespread curriculum reform which seeks to encourage broader skills and capacities. These encompass not only knowledge acquisition, but the development of a range of skills such as captured in the four fundamental capacities of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*:

- Successful learners;
- Confident individuals;
- Responsible citizens;
- Effective contributors.

Similarly, in Wales, which launched its *Curriculum for Wales* in 2020 for implementation in 2022, the educational goals are to develop learners who are:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world;
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government, 2020^[14]).

The key capacities in this process are creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem-solving; personal effectiveness; and, planning and organising.

Hong Kong, China summarises its educational goals as:

“The school curriculum should provide all students with essential life-long learning experiences for whole-person development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills and aesthetics, according to individual potential, so that all students can become active, responsible and contributing members of society, the nation and the world.” (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2001^[15])

The 2020 curriculum reforms in Norway were based on the 2017 *Education Act*. This, too, emphasised a broader vision of education and of the curriculum:

The pupils and apprentices must develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society. They must have the opportunity to be creative, committed and inquisitive. The pupils and apprentices must learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental

awareness. They must have joint responsibility and the right to participate.
(Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017_[16])

In all these jurisdictions, these broader visions for education led to renewed approaches to curriculum and assessment. Norway, for instance, based its approach on competency (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2018_[17]). Competencies are understood as the ability to acquire and use knowledge and skills in order to overcome challenges and solve problems in *familiar and unfamiliar circumstances* and situations, and to involve *understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically*.

What jurisdictions around the world have found challenging is how to translate these aspirations into their upper-secondary school assessment policies (Gouédard et al., 2020_[18]; Geisinger, 2016_[19]; OECD, 2013_[4]). At present there are few examples of how national examinations can assess broader global skills such as creativity, collaboration, and communication (OECD, 2020_[20]; Hopfenbeck and Stobart, 2015_[21]).

3.2. Digital and technical innovations may increase alignment

The 21st century has also seen dramatic advances in Information Technology and progress in digitalisation in and around education. From integrating computer-based tasks, to developing adaptive assessments for a formative and personalised learner experience, this offers new possibilities for how subjects can be examined. The potential of these tools, and of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in general, to help reintegrate learning and assessment, is significant, and a matter of international interest (OECD, 2021_[22]).

Norway provides an example of this. A decade ago, students at the University of Oslo, soon backed by students in other Norwegian universities, pushed for computer, rather than pen-and-paper, based exams. Students claimed they no longer had the handwriting skills for the traditional type of assessment. Over 2014 and 2015, Norwegian universities pioneered the National Project for Digital Exams, which digitised all exam processes from admittance to final grade. By 2020, 90% of Norwegian examinations were computer-based and this has filtered down to upper-secondary school examinations (Emmertsen, 2020_[23]). The significant development since 2015, has been that students taking secondary school examinations have had access to online resources in some centrally administered examinations. From 2012 to 2015, there was a trial of unrestricted internet access during the examination. In 2018 this was expanded to all candidates in one subject.

There have been national pilot studies in New Zealand, Israel, Norway and Finland which have used computer-delivered examinations. These showed that online and on-screen assessments could be implemented in external, sessional examinations in schools and colleges – though there were considerable logistical challenges in each case (Ofqual, 2020_[24]). These challenges fell into three main groups: the IT provision in schools; implementation issues; and equity and fairness concerns for all students.

In each country there have been concerns with IT hardware resources: were there sufficient computers and space (in Israel public libraries were also utilised) and how compatible was the hardware with the examination specifications? Solutions have ranged from state financed procurement of ‘exam ready’ devices to bring your own device (BYOD) solutions. Online delivery of the examinations also depended on broadband capacity and reliability. In rural Finland, where power cuts are frequent, the assessments are encrypted and downloaded ahead of time and distributed through local networks.

Joint research from the United Kingdom (CEA, SQA and the Welsh Government, 2014_[25]) anticipated some of these challenges, noting the underuse and underfunding of ICT for assessment purposes in schools. The research noted that in individual qualifications,

particularly in vocational areas, there has been a steady increase in the use of digital assessment tools such as e-testing and e-portfolios. For instance, the Middle Years Baccalaureate offered as part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) requires candidates to complete three e-Portfolios of coursework. One of the goals of the 2016 Digital Technology national strategy for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016^[26]) was to ‘Support, develop and embed approaches to assessment that make effective use of digital technology’. Scotland launched a new digital strategy in 2021 (Scottish Government, 2021^[27]).

Most of the technical innovations by UK examination boards have been in relation to the marking and processing of examination papers, for example, scanning candidates’ papers for marking online and standardising markers. This is done by sending scripts for which the marks were agreed by the chief and senior examiners, as unmarked scripts, allowing them to monitor the examiner’s accuracy. However, this does not impact directly on the candidates for whom the examinations operate in their traditional pen-and-paper format. At this developmental stage, the question is whether the demands of the examination, its content, and the responses required, are essentially ‘business as usual’ with the paper version transferred to a screen or whether new kinds of questions and stimulus materials are being introduced.

As a consequence of the 2020 COVID-19 closure of schools, the US College Board decided that it would not be possible for students to sit the Advanced Placement Tests [see Section 4.2.1] in the traditional way. New examinations for all 28 courses were written specifically in response to the crisis. Most of the tests took 45 minutes and had one or two free-response questions. Students wrote and submitted their responses within the allotted time for each question. Students were able to take tests on any computer, tablet, or smartphone they had access to. They could either type and upload their responses or write responses by hand and electronically submit a photo, creative procedures which inevitably raised reliability issues (College Board, 2021^[28]; Compass Education Group, 2020^[29]).

More radical examination formats are being developed in various commercial settings. Information technology has made new assessment approaches possible in terms of what can be presented on screen by way of:

- Manipulable screen-based stimulus materials. The World Class Tests in Mathematics and Problem-Solving involve manipulating objects on screen in order to solve problems². In Norway, online resources are provided for use during secondary school examinations;
- Access to the internet during the examination. Pilot secondary school examinations in Norway gave candidates unlimited access to the internet;
- ‘Tailored’ adaptive testing based on students’ responses: for instance, Alberta Computer Adaptive Assessment System (CAA); Measures of Academic Progress (MAP);
- Collaborative responses: for instance, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment collaborative problem-solving skills in which students work collaboratively online.

Such approaches are resource-intensive and expensive to develop – often beyond the reach of national examination boards. Their resource implications, such as laptops and high-capacity broadband, have meant that, at present, they have not been utilised in national

² <https://www.worldclassarena.org/world-class-tests>

examinations in the United Kingdom. These resource demands also raise issues of fairness in relation to socio-economic factors.

Where there is a policy intention to assess a broader range of skills, an option is to add additional assessments to the existing forms. In Wales there is a proposal to further roll-out the *Key Stage 4 Skills Challenge Certificate* taken at 16 in order to address ‘wider skills’ alongside revised single subject-based General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Qualifications Wales, 2021^[30]). However, this may do little to address the issue of broader skills within the GCSEs themselves.

3.3. Developing school based assessment

If it is difficult to capture elements of the broader curriculum in conventional ‘pen-and-paper’ examinations (Frederiksen and Collins, 1989^[31]), one solution is to entrust more of the summative assessment to classroom teachers, under certain conditions. This may require teachers’ further professional development in order to increase their validity and to minimise problems of reliability and bias (Moss, 2013^[32]; Black et al., 2010^[33]; Martínez, Stecher and Borko, 2009^[34]). Performance in the classroom and other settings than conventional examinations allow for adaptable tools to assess skills such as the ‘4Cs’ (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity). This is routinely done in vocational qualifications and in ‘high trust’ cultures in which teachers’ assessments are the basis of certification (for example, Norway, Queensland and Ontario). In classroom-based assessment, the outcomes are determined by the teacher. These can be tailored to local circumstances and can be designed to demonstrate a wider range of skills.

Beyond professional development of teachers themselves, additional tools may be needed to increase validity and minimise the risk of bias or lesser reliability with school-based assessment. An effective moderation process that ensures consistency across the system is one such tool. Moderation can take many forms, including teachers cross marking each other’s assessments, or a competent external organisation systematically checking school-based marking, for instance. Effective moderation processes must strike a delicate balance between rigour and manageability, in order not to overload the assessment system (OECD, 2013^[4]). Examination agencies already have experience of handling and moderating school-based examination components such as:

- Research Projects, including for example, projects about local history, geography fieldtrips;
- Extended assignments (e.g. *International Baccalaureate*, *Scottish Baccalaureate* (see Section 4.2.4));
- Teacher Assessment and teacher set examinations (e.g. Queensland (see Section 4.2.5), Norway (see Section 4.2.2), Hong Kong, China (see Section 4.3.2));
- Portfolio assessment (e.g. preparatory sketches in Art and Design subjects);
- Performance assessment and direct assessment of skills themselves (e.g. drama and music performance, science practical tasks);
- Practical skills, for example those found in vocational qualifications.

Teacher-based assessments can address a broader range of skills, and curricular reforms have generally encouraged teachers to assess these broader skills. This is the case for non-examination years in British systems. In Scotland, teachers are responsible for assessments from Primary to National 4 and teachers’ coursework marks contribute to most

subjects in National 5. England also relies on teachers' assessment at Key Stage 3 (secondary years 7-9, 11-14 year-olds).

In England's accountability system, secondary schools are judged on the basis of their examination results (see Section 4.3.3). As a consequence, teacher-assessed coursework has been largely removed from the examination system, the policy rationale being that teachers may inflate grades to improve outcomes for their schools.

In other systems, teachers continue to be largely responsible for assessing students throughout their secondary schooling. This may be in the form of *continuous assessment* in which teachers monitor and assess everyday performance. This is the *Grade Point Average* (GPA) found in North America, including Ontario from our sample. In New Zealand, Norway and Queensland teachers are trusted to provide the major mark contribution to secondary school qualifications.

The historical ebb and flow of the role of the teacher-assessed coursework which contributes to qualifications is reviewed later [Section 4.3.2]. While it offers better alignment with curriculum developments such as *Curriculum for Excellence*, the demands of school accountability found in England, of 'fair' selection in Hong Kong, China, and the workload demands on teachers in Scotland and Ireland have all had an impact on the degree to which school-based assessment contributes to qualification systems.

3.4. Changes to the school leaving age

The incremental raising of the school leaving age is a further example of an educational reform which affects examination systems. In England students can leave school at 16 but must stay in full time education, apprenticeship, or be in part-time education accompanied by 20 hours a week of work or volunteering. In Scotland, while students can still leave at 16, 88% of students continued in education or training in 2018/19 (Scottish Government, 2021_[10]). The United Kingdom saw the largest increase (5%) in staying-on rates in OECD countries between 2010 and 2018 (OECD, 2020_[7]). In Ireland 90% of students stayed in education in 2015, having taken the Junior Certificate (formerly the Junior Leaving Certificate) at 16 (MacPhail, Halbert and O'Neill, 2018_[35]).

High completion of upper-secondary education is a shared policy aim across all OECD countries. This raises questions about the nature and purpose of national examinations at age 16 and the message they send. If they are intended to certificate the successful completion of the curriculum in the first five years of secondary school education, a curriculum which now involves a wider range of skills, are there more valid ways of assessing educational progress? Are traditional single-subject examinations outdated at this stage? The original function of examinations at 16 was to certify the completion of compulsory schooling for school leavers, and to select the minority who would progress further. These examinations now have more of a 'staging post' or 'practice run' function with most students then preparing for further qualifications which are used in selection for Higher Education or training.

National testing at 16 is a feature of British systems, which is found in relatively few other assessment systems (scarce examples include mathematics and Japanese in Japan; the Junior High School Diploma in Chinese Taipei; and the National Examination Certificate in Poland (Suto and Oates, 2021_[36])). In the United States 26 states and territories have a minimum leaving age of 18, with a further 11 states set at 17, with graduation certification usually at 18. In Canada, Ontario has a school leaving age of 18. In France, where the end of compulsory education is 16, 90% of 17-year-olds remain in education with the Baccalaureate leaving qualification taken at 17-18 years (Jeantheau and Johnson, 2019_[37]).

There are national examinations at age 15 in Norway, when students graduate and move from lower-secondary schools to different upper-secondary ones. However, a student takes only one national external examination and one local oral or practical examination, marked by the teacher. Marks in other subjects are determined by teacher assessment. The examination results will influence the route taken in upper-secondary education and training and are carried forward into the final School Leaving Certificate (Tveit, 2013^[38]).

The French *brevet (Diplôme national du brevet)* is awarded at the end of lower-secondary (*collège*) at 15 and is based on equal contributions from teacher assessment and examinations. The examination component incorporates an oral test based on an inter-disciplinary project by the student which accounts for 100 of the brevet's 800 marks. It is not necessary to pass it in order to continue to upper-secondary education (Jeantheau and Johnson, 2019^[37]).

3.5. Student diversity

Education now meets the needs of a far more varied range of students within the same school or college. Scotland's inclusive practices were demonstrated by its early move away from selective to comprehensive schools. A typical classroom will have students from a variety of cultural backgrounds as well as a range of interests and attainments. Increasing cultural diversity has led to more sensitivities around the curriculum. What should be taught in history or literature? The *Black Lives Matter* movement in the United Kingdom has focused attention on Britain's colonial heritage and how it should be understood. Russia in the Gorbachev era, and post-Apartheid South Africa both had to suspend their history syllabuses while history was "re-written".

This diversity also raises issues of fairness and equity in assessment. The historic, and contemporary, appeal of examinations is that they are the fairest way of assessing students. Candidates get the same questions under the same conditions and are marked using the same mark scheme. Two challenges here are whether there has been equal access to assessment, do some have a more privileged preparation, and is the format of the assessment, for example timed written responses, the fairest way of capturing someone's understanding and skills? (Stobart, 2005^[39]). The use of more varied formats, for example school-based assessments and practical work in vocational qualifications, represent ways of making qualifications more fit-for-purpose for a more diverse candidature (see Section 6.1).

Those students, the majority in England, who 70 years ago would have left school at 15 without taking any examinations are now staying in education and training until 18. One response is to offer a broader range of courses and qualifications, with increased vocational offers in occupationally related areas, for example Hospitality and Catering, Sport and Leisure, or Business. Countries such as Norway offer a strong vocational track at 16 with over half of students taking this route. This involves two years of schooling in one of nine vocational programmes followed by two years of apprenticeship or a third year of schooling (Tveit, 2013^[38]). Routes in the Netherlands and Germany are reflected in the division, at age 11, of the school system into general and vocational pathways. In New Zealand vocational courses can contribute, along with academic ones, to the upper-secondary National Certificate of Educational Achievement. In Ireland, vocational preparation, general education, and vocational education are integrated into the national Leaving Certificate (see Section 4.1).

The French *Baccalauréat*, a highly centralised qualification, has progressively broadened its scope to include many more students. This has included incorporating vocational and professional baccalauréats alongside the traditional academic tracks. In 2018, 39% of the

student cohort enrolled in upper-secondary education were enrolled in a vocational or professional track (OECD, 2020^[7]), and over 80% of the candidates to all *baccalauréats* successfully complete the qualification every year. The *Baccalauréat* is currently undergoing further reform, including a role for teacher assessment (see Section 4.2.3).

Within British educational systems, these routes are not as clearly identified, particularly up to age 16, and are more likely to be taken as individual ‘applied’ qualifications. There is a legacy in these systems of vocational awards being seen, and treated, as less prestigious, despite policy announcements about parity. In England, the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) was given parity with the GCSEs and Advanced Levels (A Levels) only to be absorbed as ‘Applied’ GCSEs and A Levels and made more ‘academic’. In Scotland, there are vocationally oriented courses within the mainstream National 4 and 5, Highers and Advanced Highers, though they have a relatively low take-up. For example, Business Management National 5 had an entry of 7 576 in 2019 (total N5 entries 288 552). Other separate vocational courses, National Certificates and National Progression Awards made 7 061 awards. In 2019 a range of vocational awards (SCQF 1-6) were awarded to over 44 000 students (Scottish Government, 2021^[10]).

4. Student assessments in context: the impact of historical legacies

Contemporary examination systems are the product of their histories, with a basic architecture that may go back centuries. Husen (1967^[40]) argued that any educational system can only be fully understood in the context of the culture, traditions, history and general social structure of the nation it is designed to serve. These legacies may constrain reform, even where curriculum and pedagogy may have seen substantial change. In Scotland, the current system of Nationals and Highers have evolved from their 19th and 20th century precursors, with their origins in the 1888 Scottish Leaving Certificate. This brief review of different assessment systems is intended as a reminder that there is a variety of ways in which secondary school students can be assessed. These are summarised in Table 4.1.

4.1. British examination systems

The legacy for Scotland is that of the ‘British’ examinations system. Education has been distinctively Scottish since the 1707 Act of Union and made a devolved power of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. However, Scotland’s upper-secondary school assessment policies sit within a broad ‘British’ tradition of student assessment that features public examinations at key points in secondary schooling. This is also the case for other countries in the British Isles as well as, for example, Ireland and for legacy countries such as West and East Africa, Hong Kong, China, and Singapore.

Many of the distinctive features of the Scottish examination system have their origins in the structure of secondary schooling, with its transfer to higher education at age 17, and in continuous reforms to offer a more coherent progression through the different levels of examination. Recent reforms, which built on the 1977 Munn and Dunning reports, the Howie Report (1992) and the Government’s own ‘Great Debate’ in 2002, sought to reduce the examination load in the last three years of secondary schooling (McVittie, 2008^[41]). The move to new National Qualifications in 2014 sought to better align the examinations with the goals of CfE.

This does not imply uniformity in how examinations are perceived and used within this historical tradition. Commentators have emphasised the difference in approach between Scotland, with its emphasis on inclusion, and England (United Kingdom) with its emphasis

on schools as a competitive market. Arnott and Ozga (2016^[42]) in their *Education and nationalism in Scotland: governing a 'learning nation'* observe that:

“People in Scotland are offered the opportunity to identify as inheritors of a tradition that values fairness and inclusivity, while also achieving academic excellence, combined, since the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence, with a judicious dose of personal and practical development.” (p.256).

By contrast, England’s Education Reform Act of 1988 set a new direction for policy, ‘embracing a market-driven approach, greater competitiveness, and “choice and diversity among schools”’. These policies have also led to the marginalisation of local authorities and of democratically elected local government with an increase in direct government control (Furlong and Lunt, 2016^[43]).

Historically, the key purposes for these assessments have been for selection and certification, and for setting curriculum-based standards. To be successful students needed to have demonstrated the level of knowledge required by the syllabus. A more recent emphasis in this tradition has been the increased use of results for school and system accountability, though there were antecedents for this in the 19th century ‘Payment by Results’ scheme that operated in England for over 30 years.

While the origins of the written examination are found in the Chinese civil service selection examinations which were in place for over a thousand years (Stobart, 2008^[2]), the format of ‘British’ school assessments can be traced back to the 19th century. The Victorians’ enthusiasm for examinations came from the rapidly expanding professions, which saw them as a fairer way of selecting entrants for training, and for certification. Because examinations were used in relation to high-status occupations such as medicine, the model of the written, theoretical test was invested with similar status in education (Broadfoot, 1979^[44]). The formal written exam has progressively been given priority over alternative approaches such as the more applied and practical.

In British education, regular testing was introduced in universities as early as the 18th century to monitor and improve standards. This approach then filtered down to schools, and by the mid-19th century, university boards were preparing examinations for schools, particularly the private schools for the middle classes (Stobart, 2008^[2]). Increasingly the state took control of the examining process, either directly by government agencies, as in Scotland, or through direct regulation of examination providers, as in England. In England, the university boards were progressively merged as a result of political pressures, so that only three GCSE and A Level examination boards remain.

Historically these examinations then shaped, or became, the school curriculum and how it was taught. A legacy of this tradition is the dominance of the examination system as the *de facto* curriculum for those in upper-secondary school. In England, the National Curriculum originally continued up to the end of Key Stage 4 in Year 11 (age 16) but soon defaulted to ending at Year 9 (age 14) with GCSE preparation becoming Key Stage 4. While systems such as England, Scotland and Wales have each developed a national curriculum, it is the examination syllabus or specifications that dominate teaching and learning during the upper-secondary years.

The evolution of current assessment systems shows a series of incremental changes in response to social and educational changes. The governance of examinations has shifted from universities to national bodies linked to government. This trend is partly the result of selection and accountability pressures which require comparable standards between those who offer examinations. The Scotland Qualifications Authority (SQA), a non-departmental government body, performs this role in Scotland, with the Office of Qualifications (Ofqual) ensuring comparable standards across the different awarding bodies in England. In Wales,

examinations are provided by its Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), while in Ireland examinations are the direct responsibility of the State Examinations Commission.

A legacy of the British system is that of examinations being taken at age 16. The origins of examinations for 16 year-olds were in providing qualifications for school leavers – then the majority of students. Students in most developed countries are now expected to stay in education or training until 18. This is the point of formal assessment in countries such as France, North America and Australia. Outside the British tradition there are few examination systems that now test nationally at 16.

Contemporary features within the British tradition typically include:

1. Examinations are produced or regulated by a state agency, they are ‘nationalised’;
2. These are subject-based, with students taking a range of subjects, typically six or more at 16 and fewer at 18;
3. They are curriculum-related and expressed in term of a syllabus/specification;
4. Moderated teacher assessments of their students may also contribute to the final subject grade, though the weightings given to this can vary considerably;
5. Examinations are taken under standardised conditions at fixed times, often only once or twice a year;
6. Candidates’ responses are generally open-ended and marked by external examiners;
7. There is little or no pre-testing of the examinations, therefore setting grade boundaries has to take account of the relative difficulty of the papers; grade boundaries may change from year to year;
8. Grading is based on overall mark totals and, unlike some vocational qualifications, there are rarely hurdles within a subject that must be met in order to pass;
9. Grade distributions are described as standards-referenced (if there are improvements in standards more will get higher grades), though there are underlying normative assumptions (grade distributions should not change much from year to year).

Ireland has partially moved away from this framework by developing a modular (44 modules) and credit based (200 credits) system, with qualifications available in three curriculum areas (vocational preparation, general education, and vocational education). The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is integrated with the national Leaving Certificate and involves joint modules. The assessment system remains centralised, though there are credits for the satisfactory completion of modules and, unusually, 90% attendance. Moderated school-based coursework and practicals contribute to the credit system.

4.2. Alternative legacy traditions

These ‘British’ approaches to secondary school assessment can be contrasted with other assessment traditions. The intention in reviewing other traditions is to illustrate how the forms of secondary school student assessment reflect cultural differences in school assessment. Those embedded within a particular tradition may think that this is how assessment must operate. The position taken in this paper is that examining is essentially a social process. What is assessed, and how, is a cultural product and changes to assessment systems largely reflect social changes and demands.

4.2.1. American traditions

A widely adopted alternative tradition stems from the more psychometrically and reportedly objective (multiple-choice) focused approaches pioneered in the United States. These are based on statistical models which involve pre-testing, scaling of items for difficulty and machine marking (Baird et al., 2017^[45]). The administrative simplicity of this form of testing and the speed of marking have led to a world-wide uptake in education and many occupational spheres.

In American education, tests such as SATs (Princeton Review, 2021^[46]) are commercial products and operate in a market-based system with commercial alternatives such as the American College Test (ACT) (ACT, 2021^[47]). These are driven by college entrance requirements, they are not federally mandated, and there is no government oversight or accountability (Opposs et al., 2020^[48]). There are state-level tests, which may be in-house or commercially produced, and which may contribute to school graduation requirements. SATs are generally taken privately outside school; schools are not expected to prepare students for them (but they do) and they can be regularly re-taken. SATs are not directly curriculum related, they rather seek to assess how well one analyses and solves problems (CollegeBoard, 2021^[49]).

However, there is a move toward more curriculum related tests such as the Advanced Placement Tests which lead to college course credits (Morgan, 2018^[50]). The Advanced Placement Program allows students to take college-level courses while still in upper-secondary education, each course giving access to a standardised college-level assessment called “AP Exam”.

An important feature of the US system is that test scores are only one strand in the selection processes used by colleges and universities, one that is increasingly optional as a result of concerns about the fairness of the SAT in relation to disadvantaged students. Teachers’ continuous assessment (the Grade Point Average), teacher recommendations, class ranking and students’ activities all contribute. Schools issue graduation diplomas for students when students leave at 18 or if they complete their courses earlier.

In this paper, secondary school assessment in the Canadian province of Ontario offers an instructive assessment model that sits broadly within the American tradition. While education in Canada is devolved to the provincial level, the assessment system in upper-secondary schools in Ontario share many common features with the other ten provinces and three territories (DeLuca et al., 2017^[51]). It is related to the American system in using the award of credits for courses, which are combined into a graduation diploma for 18-year-olds at Grade 12. Teachers’ continuous assessments contribute the bulk of the marks in this process, 70% in Ontario’s case. Where it departs from much of the American tradition is in its limited reliance on psychometric tests (teachers generally construct their own tests) and its low-stakes school accountability systems.

Upper-secondary school students generally follow a programme leading to the *Ontario Secondary School Diploma* (OSSD). The goal in the government’s *Achieving Excellence* (2014) was for 85% of students to graduate. This involves achieving 30 credits, while students gaining over 14 credits can leave school with the *Ontario Secondary School Certificate* (OSSC). A credit is awarded for a mark of over 50% on a course. Of the 30 credits, 18 are in compulsory subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Career studies or Civics), while the other 12 come from a range of options. Students also need to complete 40 hours of community involvement activities and are required to pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). It is a school’s choice whether the OSSLT marks contribute towards the Diploma (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010^[52]).

4.2.2. Nordic systems

School examinations were introduced in the early 19th century in the Scandinavian countries. Like the British system they were initially overseen by universities. Over the rest of the century there was a struggle for control in Norway, with teachers taking control of the examination system in 1884. This was an early sign of teachers being at the centre of the examination system, a feature which is still present, though with more central regulation of the system. The inclusive social values and traditions of Scandinavian countries have minimised the use of examinations in compulsory education. Instead, teachers are given ‘high-trust’ roles in assessing their students.

The debate around testing has often been an ideological one, with tests seen as competitive and divisive in a culture where co-operation and support are central values. This has led in Norway to the banning of testing and grading of pupils before age 11. There has been some softening of this position with the introduction of diagnostic ‘mapping tests’ to identify pupils with learning difficulties and of revised national tests (after initial opposition). The national tests are taken at the beginning of Years 5 and 8 in English, Reading and Mathematics and Reading and Mathematics in Year 9. They are intended to provide formative information for teachers. There are no national school ‘league tables’ as in England and Australia.

In upper-secondary education, assessment is still predominantly the responsibility of the teacher, who contributes over 80% of the overall marks. The only cohort-based central examination is in Norwegian. In other subjects, both centrally and locally (often practical or oral) devised examinations are administered to a sample of students chosen through the ‘exam lottery’ (*trekkordningen*). The exam lottery is meant so that students shall not be examined in every subject but shall instead prepare for exams in the subjects for which the exam is a possible final assessment in addition to the marks awarded for classwork. This involves around 20% of students in a subject, with all students in both Upper-Secondary 1 and 2 taking one such exam and in Upper-Secondary 3 taking two as well as one oral, practical, or combined practical and oral exam. Each of these contributes to the final certificate. Students find out which subject they may be examined in only a day before the examination. Schools run multiple examinations based on their lottery allocations. The fairness of this ‘lottery’ approach has been widely criticised by the School Student Union of Norway, as has the stresses associated with the 24 hour advanced notice of which subject is to be taken.

4.2.3. Baccalaureate systems

The French *Baccalauréat* is a widely recognised historical system on which other Baccalaureate qualifications have been, often loosely, based. From its small-scale beginning in Napoleonic times as an elitist university entrance qualification, the *Baccalauréat général* has continuously developed in terms of scale and cost. The relatively recent introduction of new streams (*voies*), the *Baccalauréat technologique* in 1968 and *Baccalauréat professionnel* in 1985, represent politically driven reforms aimed at reducing social inequality by widening access to this nationally respected qualification. The Orientation Law of 1989 stipulated that 80% of 18-year-olds should reach *Baccalauréat* before 2000. By 2016, with two thirds of the 18-year-old cohort taking it, the pass rate was 88.6%. The significance of this is that success in the qualification gives the right to enter any university regardless of specialisation (Gautier, 2018_[53]). It was found, however, that the right of access is problematic, given 30% of university students drop out during the first year (Jeantheau and Johnson, 2019_[37]).

Despite this high-stakes function, there appears to be far less social and political interest in issues such as comparability, either over time or across streams, than in other jurisdictions. Marking standards similarly attract little research or comment, even though they are highly regionalised. The pass mark in every subject, every year, is 10 out of 20, and the qualification is awarded when the overall average is 10 or above. An averaged mark of 8 or 9 allows a candidate to take two resit tests or orals in order to reach the required 10. Grades (*mentions*) are also predetermined, 12 for an *assez bien*, 14 for *bien*, 16 for *très bien*, and 18 for *félicitations du jury*. Roger-Francois Gautier points out that:

“the standards are not known, the examination is not independently evaluated, and nobody seems to care” (Gautier, 2018, p. 126_[53]).

After limited change over many years, a major revision was planned to take place in 2021. The new academic diploma involves 10 specialist subjects. Students choose three of these in their second year of upper-secondary and just two of these in their third year. In the second year there will also be one written and one oral examination in French literature and culture. In their final year students will take examinations in Philosophy and their two specialist subjects. There will also be a 20 minute oral based on a project begun in the previous year.

The use of continuous assessments based on teacher and test-based judgements continues. These contribute 40% to the final grade, the pass mark remaining at 10 out of 20. The test content that teachers use in their tests is to be drawn from a computerised bank of nationally validated questions and will be marked by other teachers.

4.2.4. The International Baccalaureate (IB)

Better known outside the sphere of French education, this internationally recognised and high-status qualification resembles the *Baccalauréat* in incorporating a mix of subjects integrated through philosophical elements. The Diploma taken by 16-18 year-olds has three core requirements: the *Extended Essay*, an independent research essay of 4 000 words; *Theory of Knowledge* (TOK) assessed through an externally assessed essay of 1 600 words, plus an oral presentation; and *Creativity, activity and service* (CAS). Unlike the *Baccalauréat*, it has, from the outset, included a significant role for teacher assessment. The examination and moderation procedures have much in common with the British model.

The International Baccalaureate resulted from requests for a qualification for private schools that were educating international and expatriate students. These required a broader and more portable qualification system than national ones. Beginning in Geneva in the 1960s, a seven-year pilot phase operated until 1970. The two-year Diploma Programme for 16-18 year-olds now operates in 140 countries and economies around the world and can be taken in English, French and, since 1983, Spanish.

There are Baccalaureate qualifications offered separately in Scotland, England, and Wales. In Scotland they are offered within four frameworks: Expressive Arts; Languages; Science; and Social Sciences. Their distinguishing feature is an Inter-disciplinary Project that seeks to help candidates develop and show evidence of initiative, responsibility, and independent working. 157 candidates were awarded the qualification in 2019.

The *Welsh Bacc*, introduced in 2015, is based on specified combinations of national qualifications plus a *Skills Challenge Certificate* which requires an individual project plus evidence of meeting enterprise, citizenship and community challenges.

In England, the *EBacc* is essentially an accountability device which directs schools into which subjects they should be offering at the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) taken by 16-year-olds (thus narrowing a school’s curriculum offer). There are no

other ‘broadening’ requirements outside the single subject GCSEs. Only those listed will be considered in the *EBacc* performance tables. This has largely been replaced by *Progress 8* measures, which serves a similar control function (UK Department for Education, 2019_[54]).

4.2.5. *The Queensland system*

Queensland, Australia, provides a well-established model of a teacher-driven examination system at the completion of upper-secondary education. In 1971 Queensland transitioned from traditional university-set and externally marked examinations to school-based assessments. These were based on the continuous assessment of student work, which was then moderated by panels of teachers (‘consensus moderation’) rather than by statistical moderation (Maxwell, 2010_[55]). The central role of teachers in grading was seen as a powerful form of professional development of assessment literacy. This, for many years, has provided a model of teacher professionalism in assessment and of how assessment can be directly linked to the curriculum.

Pressure from politicians and advocacy groups composed of university science and mathematics specialists led to a review of the system. Reporting in *2014 Matters and Masters’ review* (2014_[56]) proposed a shift towards introducing some external assessment, a change which was more the ‘result of advocacy rather than public dissatisfaction’ (Cumming, 2019, p. 171_[57]). This has led to changes in which, from 2020, upper-secondary students will complete four pieces of assessment in a subject, three internal and one external. It appears there was little teacher enthusiasm for these changes, with *Matters and Masters* commenting that their consultation responses showed “acceptance and resignation ... [that] the time had come for change” (Matters and Masters, 2014_[56]).

4.2.6. *New Zealand’s modular approach*

When New Zealand was facing an economic downturn and labour market crisis in the late 1960s, the government looked to reform the vocational education and training sector. This had been under-resourced and there was an imperative to improve young people’s skill levels. One consequence of limited work opportunities was that more students were staying on in school, the upper-secondary stage of which was dominated by the academic School Certificate Examination. Led by the secondary teachers’ union, and in collaboration with the Department of Education, there was a call for a radical overhaul of curriculum and assessment in upper-secondary school. Along with many other countries at the time, a more centralised and outcomes-based approach was adopted.

This was the background which led New Zealand to look to Scotland’s vocational provision. This too had developed out of concerns over school drop-out rates and high youth unemployment in the late 1970s. As a result of influential reports such as the Munn and Dunning reports published in 1977, and the *16-18s in Scotland: An Action Plan* published in 1983 (McVittie, 2008_[41]), a modular approach, which led to a National Certificate, was adopted. This was administered by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC). The National Certificate provided a national and portable vocational qualification.

As Lee, Lee, and Openshaw (2013_[58]) observed:

“For New Zealand’s politicians and educationalists, the apparent success of a small society like Scotland’s in developing a viable workplace qualification that eased the difficult transitions between school and work was seen as highly relevant and thus worthy of emulation, even improvement.” (Lee, Lee and Openshaw, 2013, p. 34_[58]).

The significance of this policy adoption was that New Zealand developed a modular approach and later extended it to general qualifications as well. This incorporated the abolition of the University Entrance Examination in 1986, followed by the removal of the School Certificate Examination 15 years later.

As with the 2014 new National Qualifications in Scotland, there has been mounting concern about the manageability of the National Certificates of Educational Assessment (NCEA) modular curriculum and its assessment. This was partly because of the increasing complexity of the award, as new modules were added and complex rules of transfer from one level to another introduced. A package of reforms was approved in 2020, which involved seven changes to the NCEA (New Zealand Government, 2019^[59]). These included meeting separate literacy and numeracy requirements; having fewer, larger modules; keeping the Level 1 award optional (it is the highest level achieved for 10% of students); and, restricting the carrying over of credits to the next level.

These changes will mean that students will typically take up to six subjects, from which they will need 60 credits for a Level 2 award. Half the credits will be from external assessments, which have been broadened to include portfolios, reports, performances or common assessment tasks.

4.2.7. A summary of student examination systems

Table 4.1 summarises the characteristics of student examination systems in the nine jurisdictions used for comparison in this paper. A broader overview of the variety in OECD countries' choices regarding national assessments at upper-secondary level can be found in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3.

Table 4.1. Summary of student examination systems

Jurisdiction	Legacy system	Suite of national exams by age	External exam system	External Assessment formats	Contribution of school-based assessments
England	British	16, 18	National, terminal written exams – fixed dates Graded on total marks	Mainly written	None in main subjects
France	Baccalauréat	18	National, terminal, written exams – fixed dates Fixed pass marks (10/20)	Written, oral	40% (inc. tests based on item bank)
Ireland	British	16, 18	National, terminal, written exams – fixed dates Credit based	7 written exams 7 student tasks	Credits for module completion and attendance
New Zealand	British – now independent	17-18	External module assessments – fixed dates	Exams Portfolios Reports Performances	50% teacher assessment
Norway	Nordic	15, 18 (only 1 or 2 exams)	National – only taken by a sample of students	National and local exams (including practicals and orals)	Mainly teacher assessed – including continuous assessment
Ontario (Canada)	N. American	Not applicable	No province-wide subject exams. Credit based Provincial literacy and numeracy tests	No external subject exams	Teacher assessed, inc. school tests (30%)

Jurisdiction	Legacy system	Suite of national exams by age	External exam system	External Assessment formats	Contribution of school-based assessments
Queensland (Australia)	British – now Independent	18 (teacher assessed, locally moderated)	From 2020 – statewide exam – worth 25% of total marks	Written exams introduced (25%) in 2020	75% based on coursework – teachers mark, teacher moderated
Scotland	British	14-16; 15-17; 16-18 (students' progression rates vary)	National, timed, written exams – flexible age of entry, fixed exam dates	Mainly written	Coursework tasks (varying by subject teacher assessed, externally moderated)
Wales	British	16, 18	National, timed, written exams – fixed dates	Mainly written	Coursework tasks (around 20%)
IB (International Baccalaureate)	Baccalaureate	17-18	Timed, written exams – fixed dates	Written, oral, practicals, projects	20-50% in subjects; internal assessment of core elements

Table 4.2. National/central assessments at the upper-secondary level (2015)

In general programmes

	Notes	Existence (1)	Standardised at the central (C), state (S), regional (R), school (SC) or other (O) level of government (2)	Locus of authority at which they are devised/developed (3)	Locus of authority at which they are graded/marked (4)	Mechanisms to ensure reliability of marking across students if marking undertaken at the school level (5)	Based on norm-reference (N) or criterion-reference (C) test (6)	Year first established (7)	Compulsory for schools to administer		Percentage that administer them		Percentage of students exempted from taking them (%) (12)	Subjects covered: Mathematics (MAT), Natural sciences (NS), Reading, writing and literature (RWL), Social studies (SS), Other languages (OL), Physical education and health (PE), Information & communication technology (ICT), Technology (TEQ), Arts (ART), Religion/Ethics/Moral education (REL), Practical and vocational skills (PVS) or Other subject (OTH) (13)
									Public (8)	Government-dependent private (9)	Public (10)	Government-dependent private (11)		
OECD														
Australia		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Austria		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Belgium (Fl.)		Yes	S	3,11	3,11	a	C	2010	Sample*	Sample*	5	x(10)	m	MAT,RWL,SS,OL
Belgium (Fr.)		Yes	S	3	11	G	C	2009	All	All	1	1	0	MAT,NS,RWL
Canada		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Chile		Yes	C	2	2	a	C	2011	All	All	1	1	0	MAT,RWL,OL,ICT
Czech Republic		Yes	C	2	2	a	C	2011/12	Sample	Sample	5	5	2	MAT,NS,OL
Denmark		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
England		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Estonia		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Finland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
France		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Germany	1 2	No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Greece		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Hungary		Yes	C	1	1	a	C	2001	All	All	1	1	0	MAT,RWL
Iceland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Ireland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Israel		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Italy		Yes	C	2	2	a	N	2010	All	a	1	a	0	MAT,RWL
Japan		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Korea		Yes	C	1,2	1,2	a	C	1998	All	All	1	1	m	MAT,RWL,OL
Luxembourg		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Mexico		Yes	C	1	1	a	C	2008	All	a	1	a	0	MAT,RWL
Netherlands		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
New Zealand		Yes	C	1,2	2,7,8,9	G,M	C	2002	All	a	1	a	0	MAT,NS,RWL,SS,OL,PE,ICT,TECART,REL,PVS,OTH
Norway		Yes	C	1	1,7	G	N	2009,2010,2011	All	All	1	1	2	MAT,RWL,OL
Poland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Portugal		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Scotland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Slovak Republic		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Slovenia		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Spain		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Sweden		Yes	C	2	7,8,9	G	C	1996	All	All	1	1	m	MAT,RWL,OL
Switzerland		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Turkey		No	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
United States		Yes	C	1,2	1,2	a	C	1999	Sample	a	5	a	a	MAT,NS,RWL,SS,ART

Note: Federal states or countries with highly decentralised school systems may have different regulations in states, provinces or regions. Please refer to Annex 3 for additional information. Please refer to the Reader's Guide for information concerning symbols for missing data and abbreviations.

1. National Assessment Study (Ländervergleich).
2. State-wide comparison tests (VERA: Vergleichsarbeit).

Source: OECD (2015^[60]) *Education at a glance 2015*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en>. See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).

Table 4.3. Main purposes and features used for reporting results of national/central assessments at the upper-secondary level (2015)

In general programmes

	Main purposes or uses							Features used when reporting results						
	Notes	To evaluate school performance	To evaluate teacher performance	To provide teachers with student diagnostic information	To provide formative feedback to parents	To select or group students according to their achievement levels	To actively engage students in their own learning process	Other	Show level of performance for most recent year	Show "value added" or growth in student achievement over two or more years	Context sensitive	Compared with other groups or populations of students	Reported together with other indicators of school quality	Used by authorities external to the school for sanctions or rewards
	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)	(25)	(26)	(27)
OECD														
Australia		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Austria		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Belgium (Fl.)		No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Belgium (Fr.)		No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Canada		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Chile		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Czech Republic		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Denmark		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
England		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Estonia		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Finland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
France		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Germany	1	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
	2	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Greece		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Hungary		No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Iceland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Ireland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Israel		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Italy		Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Japan		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Korea		Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Luxembourg		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Mexico		No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Netherlands		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
New Zealand		No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Norway		No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	m	a	a	a	a	a	a
Poland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Portugal		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Scotland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Slovak Republic		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Slovenia		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Spain		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Sweden		Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Turkey		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
United States		No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Partners														
Brazil		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Colombia		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
Latvia		a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a

Note: Federal states or countries with highly decentralised school systems may have different regulations in states, provinces or regions. Please refer to Annex 3 for additional information. Please refer to the Reader's Guide for information concerning symbols for missing data and abbreviations.

1. National Assessment Study (Ländervergleich).

2. State-wide comparison tests (VERA: Vergleichsarbeit).

Source: OECD (2015⁽⁶⁰⁾) *Education at a glance 2015*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en>. See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm).

4.3. Inhibiting factors in assessment reform

Assessment systems usually change gradually. The brake on any radical change may, in part, result from a social reluctance to change an established system. When a system has been in place for generations, parents, policy makers and teachers are familiar with it and value it – even when it may no longer be fit-for-purpose.

4.3.1. Teacher resistance

Teachers' co-operation in education reforms is a major factor of their success. Alternatively, their resistance can significantly delay their implementation (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[61]). In 2012, proposed policy-driven changes to the externally examined Irish *Junior Certificate* involved a substantial role for teacher assessment. These met with fierce teacher union resistance on the grounds that their role was to teach, not to examine, their students. The Irish junior cycle reforms are described in some detail because they bear direct relevance to Scotland's introduction of the new National Qualifications in 2012 (see Box 4.1). In contrast, the introduction of national curriculum tests in Norway in 2005 led to strikes by both teachers and students at concerns over how the results would be used, leading to their temporary withdrawal. Concerns about reform may lead to delayed, or revised, implementation. In Hong Kong, China it took ten years to agree *The New Academic Structure* (2005; 2013 see below) with its changes to the academic and assessment systems.

Box 4.1. Reforming the Junior Certificate in Ireland

The Irish Junior Certificate, formerly the Junior Leaving Certificate, is taken by 15-year-olds at the end of the three-year junior secondary school cycle. The results are published mid-September – after the students have already progressed to upper-secondary education (referred to as “the senior cycle” in Ireland). It is, therefore, ‘low-stakes’ for the students as there are limited consequences for them. However, it is still perceived as ‘high-stakes’ by the public, even though over 90% of students now stay in school until 18. It no longer has a ‘gateway’ function and so is largely treated as ‘a dry run, for the Senior Leaving Certificate two years later’ (Looney, 2006^[62]).

The Junior Certificate was introduced in 1989 to achieve greater breadth and balance in the curriculum. A review in 1999 found the curricular goals were not being achieved due to a mismatch between the re-designed and outward looking curriculum and the conventional terminal examination. The teaching-to-the-test and rote learning throughout the junior cycle were highlighted as contributing factors in the disengagement of students. The need for reform was recognised by the then minister of education and a development process set in train. A Framework for Junior Cycle was published in 2012 which included a classroom-based assessment component weighted at 40% of the award, with 60% based on an externally set, but teacher marked, examinations.

This reform met strong opposition from teacher unions. Their opposition took the form of non-cooperation with the introduction of the new junior cycle. This led to negotiations which in 2015 produced a revised Framework. This re-introduced state set and administered examinations. While the Junior Certificate was not re-introduced, the examination results became part of a Profile of Achievement. Reported alongside these were the teacher-assessed components, by this stage reduced to two structured classroom-based assessments (CBA) for each subject, one in the second year and one in the third. The tasks are externally set but assessed by the classroom teacher. After the

second CBA, students complete a written Assessment Task which reflects on their coursework. This is externally marked and weighted at 10%, the examination contributing 90%.

This retrenchment to externally set and marked examinations is an example of the resistance that assessment reform can generate. In this case it was how teachers in Ireland viewed their professional identity and roles. Summatively assessing their own students was not part of this.

Source: Looney (2006_[62]) Assessment in the Republic of Ireland, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, Vol. 13/3, pp. 345-353, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940601035544> and McPhail, A., Halbert, J., and O'Neill, H., (2018_[35]) The development of assessment policy in Ireland: A story of junior cycle reform, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, Vol. 25/3, pp. 310-26.

Scotland's reforms also met resistance, largely because of the assessment load placed on teachers, including the demands of the quality assurance system. The revised 2017 version of Scottish qualifications saw a retrenchment towards a more traditional examination system, with teacher assessment of individual units abandoned, on a phased basis, from National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, leading to an overall award in which the role of the final examinations was expanded.

4.3.2. Comparability and selection pressures

Lack of change in assessment practices can also come from concerns about the comparability of assessment results between schools, and across exams that award the same levels of qualifications or give access to similar pathways, for instance, into higher education institutions. Hong Kong, China is a Confucian-heritage society that values examinations as central to selection and progress. Examination results are high-stakes for students as there is intense competition for government-funded university places. Both the curriculum and its assessment have seen reform. A significant element of this is *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Educations and Higher Education* (2005; 2013), which changed the secondary education to three years of junior secondary schooling, three years of upper-secondary schooling and then four years of tertiary education. This was a break with the previous five, two (secondary) and three-year (tertiary) approach modelled on England's GCSE and A Level system. This reform took 'over ten years of patient discussion and lobbying to resolve the controversies' (Tong, Lee and Luo, 2020, p. 234_[63]).

For a strongly examination-focused culture such as Hong Kong, China, the introduction of school-based assessment contributing to final grades has been a contentious process. The aim has been to encourage broader study, but the need for comparable results between both schools and subjects has led to demanding, and disputed, moderation processes. This in turn has led to teacher resistance, particularly at the workload involved and concern about the moderation processes which include complex statistical moderation of coursework marks.

In England, with its three examination boards, there has been a longstanding concern with comparability, given university entrance is largely dependent on A Level grades. To ensure grades are comparable between the three awarders, extensive regulatory procedures have been progressively introduced to guarantee they involve similar demand and that marking and grading procedures are the same. The official regulator, the Office of Qualifications (Ofqual), now monitors every aspect of the examination process.

The same issues can arise within an awarding body when more than one syllabus operates in a particular subject. The regulatory response to a potential lack of comparability has been to limit the number of syllabuses an awarding body can offer in a single subject. This has

left no incentive for experimental syllabuses that may align better with recent curricular and educational approaches.

4.3.3. *The influence of accountability systems*

A key element in resistance to change is the role of examination results in the school accountability system, particularly in education systems where government rely heavily on these results for monitoring schools' progress and setting attainment targets (Eggen and Stobart, 2014^[64]). Examinations in high-stakes accountability systems, such as England's, have a dual purpose: they are high stakes for students in terms of progression and selection, and high stakes for schools in terms of being judged by their examination results. This may lead to distortions in the system, which reduce the validity of the assessments as measures of student learning. As such, the jurisdiction's accountability system can be a particularly difficult obstacle to incorporate teacher assessment into students' final results.

Where school accountability is largely predicated on examination results, there is a perception that teachers will inflate their students' coursework results in order to improve a school's results and therefore, its standing. The political logic was that teacher-assessed coursework 'allows teachers to reward themselves'. This has led to a reduction in the teacher assessment components in those 'British' systems with high-stakes accountability.

In England, there has also been a narrowing both of curriculum choice through what 'counts' in the accountability system, the *Progress 8* measure for GCSE which specifies which subjects 'count' in the calculations of school performance. At A Level the prestigious Russell Group of universities lists nine 'facilitating subjects' (for example, English literature, modern languages and mathematics) 'that keep your options open when choosing a degree' (Success at School, 2020, p. 1^[65]). Critical thinking, citizenship studies and general studies A Levels should only be taken as 'extras'. The format of examinations in England has also become more restricted as the result of the 2013 removal of modular examinations and a reversion to final one-off 'linear' examinations.

Scotland has not followed the English model of centralised high-stakes accountability. Policy makers have avoided examination based 'league tables' and opted for a more complex mix of local and central accountability such as the *Insight* comparator. The OECD's 2015 review of Broad General Education in Scotland (OECD, 2015^[66]) argued that governance in school education has two aspects, a vertical hierarchy running from the "minister downwards" and a "horizontal logic" which is about professionals' networks of sharing knowledge and collaborative support. One outcome of this is that teacher-assessed coursework still contributes to final qualification grades, though to a lesser extent.

In other jurisdictions, such as Ontario, Queensland and Norway, where examination results play only a limited role in the accountability systems, there is even more reliance on teacher assessment. These 'high-trust' jurisdictions use teachers' assessments to determine results which directly contribute to a student's qualifications, for example their school graduation award. Assessment is largely decentralised and therefore can be more flexible. In Queensland teachers act as examiners for their own students with their assessments locally moderated. In Ontario (and other Canadian provinces) teachers determine a student's course marks and make summative subject assessments which are the basis of graduation. There is only limited external testing, and this is not used to moderate teachers' assessment. The culture of these jurisdictions is that teachers can be trusted to assess fairly. The lack of checks for teacher bias and unreliability is offset by the fact that student progression is based on a wider range of measures (Ontario), on moderation processes (Queensland) or on local comparisons with examination results of a sample of students (Norway).

5. The COVID-19 ‘stress test’ revealed the fragility of assessment systems

The 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 pandemic has placed unique stresses on examinations systems in those countries where schools closed. An estimated 1.58 billion learners were off school in 2020, which represent 91.3% of total enrolled learners in the world and an unprecedented situation in the history of education. About 63 million primary and secondary teachers were also affected. Where IT infrastructure and stable internet connection existed, teachers then sought to transfer teaching and learning online (UNESCO, 2020_[67]). Those jurisdictions that relied solely on examination results experienced crises as procedures had to be hastily developed to determine grades. This was necessary for university and selection for the start of the university year. The COVID-19 related crises seem to reveal the vulnerability of systems that rely exclusively on the results of examinations taken under standardised conditions and scheduled at a fixed time. By comparison, those systems that draw on multiple forms of evidence were indeed able to adapt more flexibly.

5.1. Approaches to adapt upper-secondary examinations across countries

Examinations in Scotland were cancelled on 19 March 2020, a day before the closure of schools. The initial response in Scotland and England was to use statistical algorithms based on predictions of centre performance to generate results that were comparable to the grade distribution patterns in 2019. Both countries experienced a strong student and media backlash against the perceived unfairness of this quantitative approach for individual students and for disadvantaged schools which were perceived as penalised by the algorithms (Priestley et al., 2020_[12]).

In England, after student protests against the algorithm made media headlines, alternative ways of grading were rapidly sought. Teachers were then asked to award grades to their students. While teachers routinely provide predicted grades as part of university selection, they do not have to provide evidence for them. As there was no longer a coursework component in most GCSE and A Level subjects, the final grades were based on teachers own judgements of students’ classroom work. There was no system in place for any moderation of these grading decisions in England.

In Ireland, the initial response to the lockdown was to move the examinations to 29 July, with students returning to school two weeks before this. This led to a strong student protest, with a poll of 24 000 final-year students showing that 80% favoured the cancellation of the examinations (CNBC, 2020_[68]). In a change of policy, the final-year examinations were then cancelled with grades being calculated by schools and then moderated through a national standardisation process. A chance to take the Leaving Certificate examination was offered in November 2020, with over 2 000 students taking at least one subject.

In France, high school students did not sit the *Baccalauréat* examination in 2020. It was the first time since its introduction under Napoleon in 1808 that the exam did not take place in its traditional form. Even the student protests of May 1968 did not prevent the exam going ahead. In 2020, students received an average score in each subject, calculated from marks given for tests and homework throughout the year (Ofqual, 2020_[69]).

After Scotland’s grading crisis, the government commissioned a review of the 2020 awarding processes. The *Rapid Review of National Qualifications Experience 2020*, published in September 2020, detailed the events around the award of grades. It was critical of the statistical procedures that were initially used, of ignoring warnings about them from April onwards, and of the lack of transparency about them. The failure to engage in

qualitative moderation of the statistical findings at local level was also highlighted (Priestley et al., 2020_[12]).

There was also concern from some respondents that, instead of cancelling coursework which would have contributed to results, greater efforts to assess it could have been made, thus contributing to the final grade and providing a more robust evidence base for estimation (Priestley et al., 2020, p. 17_[12]). A broader finding was:

“This review has found consistent support from all stakeholders (including young people and parents), for a reduced emphasis on terminal examinations as the basis for qualifications. There is widespread support for continuous assessment and its benefits (including the potential for assessments to be used in a more formative way than at present), when teaching to the test – often in highly formulaic ways – seems to be the norm.” (Priestley et al., 2020, p. 44_[12])

In 2020, anticipation of more school closures in 2020/21 and the expected differential degrees of learning loss across different geographical areas and schools, the governments of Scotland and Wales announced examinations would not take place in 2021. Based on the Priestley (2020_[12]) recommendations, the Scottish Government first announced in October that National 5 examinations would be cancelled in 2021. A similar decision was made in December 2020 for Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. Grades would be based on teacher judgement supported by quality assurance. The Alternative Certification Model (ACM) involved SQA generated online examination questions which teachers marked using SQA mark schemes (SQA, 2020b). There were then local quality assurance and sample based SQA quality assurance processes. The governments of England and Northern Ireland announced that examinations would go ahead in 2021, but then they too had to cancel examinations, the announcements coming as a result of school closures in January 2021. In England, a similar process was set up of awarding body mini-examinations, selected and marked by teachers, which focused on syllabus content that has been covered.

The early signs in England and Scotland are that this has led to considerable workload issues in schools for both teachers and students. In Scotland, it has been claimed that this has led to many smaller exams for every subject, and forced schools to create complicated timetables covering all these fragmented examinations over a five-week period (Deerin, 2021_[70]).

Other education systems were able to adapt their examinations more flexibly. In Ontario, which also experienced school lockdowns, the assessment problems were less acute as the system relies largely on teacher assessment. Provincial testing is not used as exit exams or for high-stakes decisions. Courses typically involve a final teacher-developed examination worth 30% of the grade. When schools were closed teachers typically used grades from pre-closure periods. The pre-closure grades or pass/fail judgements were solely based on teacher classroom assessment (information gathered from direct communications with Christopher DeLuca).

This was much the same in Norway where secondary school examinations were cancelled in 2020. The consequences of the cancellation were not dramatic, as exams count for 20% of the final grade, teachers' assessment counting for 80%. Similarly, the International Baccalaureate examinations were cancelled and instead students were awarded a Diploma or a Course Certificate, which was reportedly “based on the student’s coursework and the established assessment expertise, rigor and quality control already built into the programmes” (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020_[71]).

In the United States, the summer SAT test was cancelled, leading to many US universities adjusting their admission criteria to focus on the other school-based elements, which are

also used in the selection. In contrast, the Advanced Placement tests went online (see Section 3.2).

In New Zealand, where schools had also been locked down in March 2020, the examinations for the National Certificate of Educational Attainment (NCEA) were delayed for an extra ten days in November. Despite calls for a reduced credit requirement, the qualification was awarded as usual.

5.2. Opportunities for long term change

Adapting Thomas Kuhn's concept of "paradigm shift" in science, Isaacs and Gorgen (2018^[72]) have considered the conditions that may lead to major shifts in a country's examination system. Kuhn had defined a paradigm as something offering a "universally recognised scientific achievement that, for a time, provides model problems and solutions for a community of researchers" (Kuhn, 1962^[73]). Over time anomalies build up and an alternative explanation proves more compelling to enough people for paradigm shift to occur. Isaacs and Gorgen point out that in educational assessment, unlike science, there is no one dominant model. They identified three pre-conditions that are involved in any paradigm shift:

1. There must be dissatisfaction with the currently accepted model (paradigm);
2. There must be an alternative, agreed upon, paradigm that is a better fit;
3. The advocates of the new paradigm must outnumber or outweigh those supporting the old paradigm.

While these are necessary conditions, they may still not lead to radical change. Accommodation within the traditional approach is still more likely. In relation to the first pre-condition, the 'stress test' failures of 2020 have left a deep level of dissatisfaction with those assessment systems dependent on examinations. The discontent was apparent in both media reporting and criticisms of the political handling of the situation. Within England, Scotland and Ireland, active student protests led to extensive media coverage. In England, the various U-turns and short notice announcements have led to widespread media criticism of the secretary of state for education, including from his own regulator, Ofqual (Adams, 2020^[74]).

The alternative that proved a better fit during the pandemic is found in those systems that include a substantial teacher assessment component in their qualifications. Jurisdictions such as Ontario, Queensland and Norway were able to adapt relatively easily to school closures and examination cancellation. This was also the case for the *International Baccalaureate* (IB), which used evidence available from teachers on their students' achievement; externally marked coursework, in each subject already completed; predicted grades from teachers; and evidence on how these two pieces of data usually related to final grades for each school (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020^[71]).

At this stage, in mid-2021, it is difficult to judge whether the impact of the 2020 crisis, and the preparations for 2021 without examinations, and possible disruptions to the examination cycle in 2022, have created sufficient momentum to develop more resilient assessment systems in the United Kingdom. These systems would be likely to include substantial school-based assessments as part of qualifications.

In England, there has been increasing media advocacy of a switch from examinations to alternative forms of assessment. A *Sunday Times* headline in England on 31 January 2021 read '*Schools seize on 'perfect time' to explore exam-free future*'. The article cited high profile schools that were already dropping examinations at 16 in favour of digital passports

of teenagers' progress. Evidence of changing attitudes can be found in the current advocacy by Lord Baker of Dorking for the GCSEs removal, when it was he, as education minister, who oversaw the introduction of the GCSE in 1986. The *Rethinking Assessment* movement in England is campaigning for the reform of the “mutant exam system” which “is not turning out youngsters who succeed in the 21st century” (The Times, 2020^[75]).

The alternatives developed in the wake of COVID-19 disruptions opened many possibilities to rethink upper-secondary assessment systems. Whether they gain sufficient support and weight during the current examination crises, along with the recognition that Britain is the last country in Europe in which pupils take national examinations at 16, is unclear.

6. What is needed for a dependable assessment system that supports learning?

6.1. Dependable assessments: validity, reliability and manageability

Any assessment system that commands public support has to balance *validity*, *reliability*, and *manageability*. The OECD defines manageability in terms of *transparency* and *usability* (OECD, 2013^[4]). Public confidence is vital if an assessment system is to be effective, while a loss of faith in a system will undermine the status and value of qualifications. If they are perceived as unfair, a validity and reliability issue, or unmanageable (by students and teachers), results will not be trusted. As presented in Section 3, different education systems use different formats and technologies, each with their own curricular and technical trade-offs and each with particular threats to trustworthiness.

Scotland has a cultural tradition which values fairness and inclusivity (Arnott and Ozga, 2016^[42]) and this is reflected in equity concerns in relation to qualifications. These values are reflected in the progression levels through National Qualifications and Highers, in which students can choose to exit the examination system, and in the differential rates at which students can progress through it.

John Bigg's conceptualisation of *constructive alignment* between curricular intention and what happens in practice suggests that any system has to be evaluated for the *fitness-for-purpose* of its instruments – are they assessing what they claim to assess? Frederiksen and Collins' *principles of systemically valid testing* (1989^[31]) is a useful theoretical framework for such evaluation, especially when gauging the validity of examination papers and assessment by teachers which contribute to qualifications, as well as extended assignments and portfolio-based assessment. At the heart of this approach is how the desired curricular skills and understanding can be actively encouraged and reinforced by the format and demands of the test.

Operating within the American system, their concern was that the reliance on multiple-choice testing was not fit-for-purpose because it encouraged inappropriate forms of teaching and learning. They drew on performance-based forms of assessment and proposed standards for assessment, which included:

1. *Directness*. This involves assessing the cognitive skill of interest – the emphasis being on the authenticity of tasks, which are representative of the way knowledge and skills are used in real-world contexts;
2. *Scope*. This considers the range of skills needed to do well in the tasks;
3. *Reliability*. This seeks effective ways of assessing which, at the same time, fosters learning;

4. *Transparency*. This is the concern that those being assessed are clear about how they are being judged. This should enable learners to “assess themselves and others with almost the same reliability as the actual test evaluators achieve” (Frederiksen and Collins, 1989^[31]).

In the American system the trade-offs involve the benefits of manageability and reliability at the cost of the limited validity of what is assessed. When there are no, or few, open-ended (‘constructed’) responses which allow students to demonstrate their own thinking, only limited inferences can be made about students’ thinking and skills. In ‘high trust’ systems such as Norway there is the potential for a broader range of skills to be assessed, giving them more construct validity. There may be concerns, however, about the comparability of assessments between schools, a reliability issue.

In order to broaden the curriculum and students’ skills, Hong Kong, China’s examination reforms introduced more teacher assessment. This was intended to improve the examination’s validity and encourage broader learning. Because of the high-stakes nature of the qualifications, maintaining reliability was seen as essential. This led to complex moderation procedures, which threatened the manageability of the qualifications and teacher goodwill. Queensland also addressed reliability issues by extensive consensus moderation.

Manageability was also an issue for Scotland’s 2012 introduction of the new modular National Qualifications, which led to an assessment overload for teachers. The 2017 revisions of the National Qualifications could be seen as a move to make them more manageable by reducing the teacher assessment demands for each module and increasing the examination weighting. The trade-off in Scotland was a reduction in the range of what would be assessed, a restriction of construct validity.

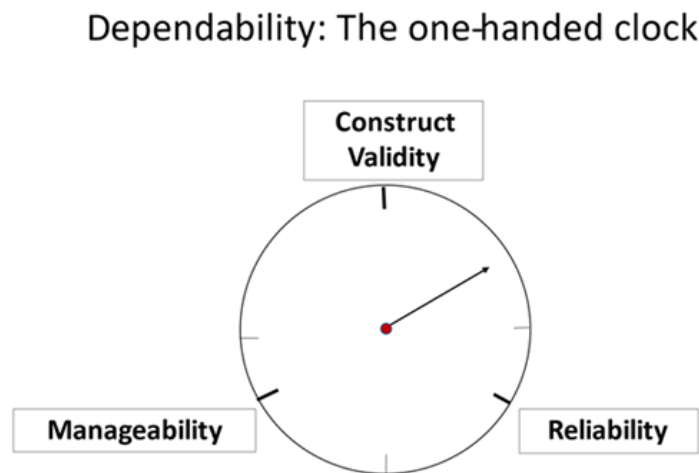
This interplay of validity, reliability and manageability is illustrated in the assessment of English for 11-year-olds in England in the National Curriculum Key Stage 2 tests. In 2011, there was a ‘longer writing’ paper as part of the test which required pupils to demonstrate their ability to construct a piece of writing on a given topic. This aligned with the demands of the national curriculum (construct validity). In 2011, there were protests about the fairness of the external marking (reliability) of the writing paper with 30 000 appeals made by schools. This led to marking being handed over to the teachers in 2012 (increased manageability). This, in turn, led to an increase in scores (a reliability issue) and the paper was dropped from 2013 onwards (a validity issue). English is now tested through a Reading and a Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) paper (easier and more reliable to assess). This reduction of the domain has led to it no longer being called English, because of the lack of construct validity in relation to the national curriculum. While teacher assessment incorporates the fuller curriculum, these assessments are not incorporated into the performance tables by which schools are judged.

Dependability is a useful concept with which to evaluate assessments. A dependable assessment is one we can rely on to give us a trustworthy estimate of students’ capabilities. It involves an optimal trade-off between construct validity, reliability, and manageability. Construct validity involves effectively sampling the domain being assessed. To be dependable, an assessment also needs reliability; grading a skill with no agreed assessment scheme reduces confidence judgements of students’ performances, as do differences in the administration of an assessment. We can achieve a valid and reliable assessment, but it may be at the (unaffordable) cost of manageability.

In Figure 6.1 the hand can only be in one place, illustrating the inevitability of trade-offs. At 10 minutes we have a valid and reliable assessment that may require costly and expensive processes, for example, training an airline pilot; at 50 minutes we may have a valid and manageable teacher assessment that has limited reliability. What is to be avoided

is to be at 30 minutes – a manageable, machine marked (reliable) test which is easy and reliable to assess but bears little relation to the construct, for example, a multiple-choice test of creativity.

Figure 6.1. Dependability: the one-handed clock



Source: Stobart (2008^[2]) *Testing Times: The Uses and Abuses of Assessment* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203930502>.

These trade-offs also apply to assessment systems. Where there are a variety of strands contributing to students' outcomes, then these trade-offs will vary and may lead to a more dependable, trustworthy and resilient overall system.

The National Qualifications in Scotland raise a trade-off issue in relation to construct validity: is the 'construct' that the examinations are sampling the 3-18 *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE)? If so, how validly are the examination specifications sampling this? Is there evidence of the examinations under-representing the curriculum by only partially covering CfE? This is a curriculum debate that needs to precede any examination reform. The OECD report on *Curriculum for Excellence* (2021) offers the stimulus for this and may, in turn, raise the question of whether the current examination format is fit-for-purpose.

6.2. What do students want?

Students' voices, although legitimate and often constructive, can be overlooked in the midst of expert, public, and political deliberations about assessment systems. Some evidence collected for a number of studies, such as Priestley et al. (2020^[12]), the SQA and Young Scot report (SQA and YoungScot Observatory, 2018^[13]) and the OECD report (OECD, 2021^[5]), suggests that students would prefer a system which includes some form of continuous assessment by their teachers. Priestley et al. (2020^[12]) reported from discussions with students that:

“Young people would like to see achievement captured throughout the year, rather than the ‘two term’ dash towards examinations (in particular for Higher)”
(Priestley et al., 2020, p. 39^[12]).

This observation came off the back of the 2020 cancellation of examinations and the use of an algorithm that, in seeking similar overall grade distributions to previous years, ignored individual student performance, something that was widely perceived as unfair. The same happened in England, leading to student protests. In Ireland, there were student objections to delaying the examinations until late July.

These were reminders that it is those being assessed who are most directly affected by an assessment. To attempt to preserve year-on-year patterns of grade distributions ('standards') was a corporate response from the United Kingdom's nationally controlled systems. It was the perceived unfairness to individuals that became the toxic political issue leading to rapid policy changes in how qualifications were awarded in 2020.

Even if the result is low-stakes for the students, it will still impact on their identity as learners. The *Junior Certificate* in Ireland was a low-stakes examination, there were few direct consequences for the student, but its public legacy meant it was perceived as high stakes. This resulted in pressure being placed on the students about their performance. This is also the case with the Key Stage 2 tests at the end of primary school in England. They have no direct impact on secondary school selection, which has already happened, and are therefore low-stakes for the pupils. However, because the accountability system judges schools by their KS2 results, they can have serious consequences for schools. This in turn leads to teachers spending much of Year 6 teaching to the test and pressurising pupils to take them very seriously (Reay and Wiliam, 1999^[76]).

7. Options from Scotland and beyond for the future of student assessment in upper-secondary education

7.1. International examples of alternatives to the British examination legacy

Scotland's senior phase assessment system sits firmly with the British legacy tradition with its focus on curriculum-based national examinations which are externally set and marked. Like Wales, Ireland and Hong Kong, China, but unlike England, most qualifications involve an element of coursework. The questions are not pre-tested and the grading process relies on examiner, and statistical, judgements about the relative difficulty of a paper. The long history of external examinations in the United Kingdom carries with it the legacy that both the public and policy makers may believe that frequent external examinations are necessary and the fairest way to assess learners. The discussions around the teacher-assessed National 4 qualifications in Scotland, in which there was pressure from some teachers and employers to introduce examinations, reflect these social pressures (Assessment and National Qualifications Working Group, 2018^[77]).

One of the distinctive features of this tradition is the continued use, at the end of compulsory education, of large-scale national examinations for 16 year-olds. In England, where education and training are compulsory until 18, the GCSE still dominates secondary schooling up to 16. Now in Scotland only around 12% of students leave at the end of compulsory schooling (S4), in 2009/10 the leaving rate was around 45% (European Commission, 2021^[78]). In Wales and Ireland, staying in education beyond 16 is now the norm.

Other educational systems in which compulsory education ends at 16 years rely less on a diet of external examinations:

France. The *brevet (Diplôme national du brevet)* is awarded at the end of lower-secondary education (at 15-16 years) and is based on equal contributions from teacher assessment

and examinations. The examination component incorporates an oral test based on an inter-disciplinary project by the student which accounts for 100 of the brevet's 800 marks. The marks in the brevet, which 90% of students pass, are not a requirement for progress into upper-secondary but contribute, along with teacher recommendations and parent and student preferences, to the type of education followed in upper-secondary education.

Norway. The assessment of 16-year-olds, prior to moving on to upper-secondary, is based on teacher assessment of classwork (88%), with local (5%) and central (7%) examinations making up the rest. It is a decentralised model, with recent curriculum changes based on a new core curriculum implemented from 2020 and *Subject Renewal* which seeks to form a better link between the core curriculum and each subject curriculum by emphasising key elements of the core curriculum within each subject (European Commission, 2021^[79]).

New Zealand, which itself broke away from the British tradition, is also undergoing reform as a result of concerns about assessment overload, similar to those Scotland experienced after the introduction of the National Qualifications from 2014. The reformed National Certificate of Educational Attainment (NCEA) will have 'fewer, larger standards' of what has to be achieved, and require fewer credits within each subject (60 instead of 80). The NCEA Level 1 qualification in Year 11 (age 15-16) is optional and intended for school leavers. Most students start Level 2 qualifications which they complete in Year 12. Teacher assessment and external assessments are equally weighted, with the Government announcing that 'Perhaps the biggest assessment opportunity presented by the change package is the chance to reconsider what is at the heart of our learning programmes and to design approaches to assessment that recognise this' (Education Central, 2019^[80]).

Internationally, the Middle Years Baccalaureate (MYB), the junior secondary course offered in many IB international schools, offers a MYB certificate at 16. Candidates for this must take eight e-Assessments, five on-screen examinations in five subjects and three e-Portfolios of coursework, including a personal project. They must also meet school requirements for 'service in action'.

In Scotland the narrower diet of examinations appears to dominate teaching and curriculum in S4 and S5. There is also a backwash into S3, since a nominal 160 hours are needed for each subject of the typical 6-9 subjects, so preparation in schools begins before S4, casting 'a long shadow' back to the initial experiences of secondary school. The subject specifications for the National 5 examinations have become the *de facto* curriculum and can lead to a narrower 'teaching-to-the-test' pedagogy in the subjects that students will generally take. At this point, the 3-18 *Curriculum for Excellence* loses strength (OECD, 2021^[5]).

The question that this comparative study raises is whether the National 5 diet of subject specific examinations is still needed at age 16. CfE already provides a framework for schools' curricula, which calls for a wider range of future-oriented capacities to be developed. Over 80% of students continue in school beyond this point, most taking Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications which have a clearer progression and selection function (Skills Development Scotland, 2015).

7.2. Options for moving beyond legacy models

This section offers some options that may aid the alignment of the current senior phase assessment system with *Curriculum for Excellence* and with more general aspirations for 21st century learning. It is based on the analysis of the Scottish student assessment system in a comparative perspective:

7.2.1. Exploring the replacement of examinations at age 16 by a school graduation certificate

There is a historical ambiguity in Scotland about whether the assessments at S4, S5 and S6 should be seen as a step-by-step ‘ladder’ of qualifications up which students progress; or whether students should simply take a single ‘exit’ examination at the appropriate level (for example National 4/5 for school leavers; Highers for Higher Education; Advanced Highers for university entrance both inside and outside Scotland). The original intention appears to have been for students going on to higher levels of qualifications to bypass lower level qualifications. This did not materialise and the anecdotal evidence is that most schools follow the step-by-step route. An immediate option here is to clarify the intentions behind having three diets of national examinations in three years and to establish the choices that students have in this. Priestley et al. (2020_[12]) have questioned ‘the continued viability of a ladder of qualifications approach, characterised by the ‘two term dash’, and a competency-based ‘mastery approach to assessment’ (p.44).

In comparative terms, Scottish upper-secondary school students are more frequently examined than those in other jurisdictions. This is a consequence of the tradition of offering three suites of examinations (National 5; Highers; Advanced Highers) during secondary years S4, S5, and S6. The yearly demands of the examination system attract criticism from both students and educationalists. After experiencing a Broad General Education (BGE) based on the *Curriculum for Excellence* in primary school, transfer to secondary school is perceived as an experience dominated by examination preparation. Many students are involved in traditional examinations for three consecutive years – a continuation of the historic ‘two term dash’. This diet of examinations may limit the depth and breadth of teaching and learning. The system could be simplified by substituting other forms of certification at S4 that capture more of the students’ capabilities than the current National Qualifications, which for many students will involve a narrowing of the curriculum studied. This is an examination loading not found in the other jurisdictions.

Scotland may consider ‘de-cluttering’ the historical diets of examinations during upper-secondary years S4-S6, and reflect on when and why Scottish students should take examinations, and consider alternative ways to acknowledge the end of compulsory schooling. One example of such alternative would be to remove National 5 examinations at 16 (S4), and to move to a school graduation certificate or diploma. There are now relatively few jurisdictions outside the British tradition with national examinations at the end of compulsory schooling. Internationally, the majority of students now stay on in education or training beyond 16 years of age and upper-secondary school assessments focus on students at 18.

As it is the end of compulsory education, some form of school graduation certificate may indeed be more appropriate. This may include some external components combined with school-based assessments and other contributions to the community. It would build on the teacher assessment that has been central to Primary to S3 assessment. This would allow for clearer recognition of the development of the four capacities of the CfE and offer better alignment with the 3-18 curriculum. The certificate would not simply be an extension of the S3 report. It would incorporate activities inside and outside school and broader attainments and might be organised around the four capacities of CfE. It could draw on the broader-based graduation diplomas found in North America, such as the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (Box 7.1). Other examples to draw from include certification in Nordic systems, and the IB Middle Years certificate.

Box 7.1. The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)

The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) is awarded at age 17/18. Students must earn 18 school assessed credits from ten compulsory weighted areas: English (four credits), one per senior grade; Mathematics three credits (across two grades); Science (two credits), History, Geography, Arts, Health and Physical Education; French (each one credit); Career Studies and Civics (0.5 credit each), and one credit from each of three subject groups (e.g. Language). 12 optional credits from other subject areas are required; as well as 40 hours of community involvement; and the provincial literacy requirement.

For those who do not meet these requirements, the Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC) can be awarded. It requires seven credits (two in English) and seven optional credits. Students who do not meet the OSSC minimum may be awarded a Certificate of Accomplishment which recognises students' achievements.

Source: Ottawa-Carleton District school board, "Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements", https://ocdsb.ca/secondary/programs/ontario_secondary_school_diploma_requirements [accessed on 15 July 2021].

In a culture like Scotland's, which is historically steeped in examinations, this option may be dismissed as a 'non-runner'. However, it has been observed that at the outset of designing the new National Qualifications, there was active consideration of making National 5, along with National 4, a teacher-assessed qualification. Previous attempts to introduce profile-type assessment have had limited impact, such as the Howie Report published in 1977 (Scottish Government, 1992^[81]), which sought to encourage this at S5/6, and the UK Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) in the 1990s. The S3 report at the end of Broad General Education encourages recording of a wide range of both academic and broader achievements. However, there is little evidence of them being taken seriously. The wide recognition of the lack of alignment of National 5 with *Curriculum for Excellence* (OECD, 2021^[5]) and the system failures during the COVID-19 pandemic, could provide a new impetus for change.

If the intention of the National Qualifications is alignment with *Curriculum for Excellence*, further steps are needed to encourage a more expansive pedagogy in S4-6. The critical question is whether the preparation for the National Qualifications is still closer to the historical preparation for the Standard Grades than to the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The case for a certificate at 16 years incorporating a broader range of attainments than SQA subject certificates is strengthened by the examination statistics from 2019. The teacher-assessed National 4 had 46 544 learners entered. Of these, 43.2% (20 107 learners out of 46 544) registered only one pass while 4.9% (2 278 out of 46 544) had no passes (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2019^[82]). These results provide minimal information about the students, a substantial proportion of whom will leave school. This is also the case for National 5 in which, of the 80 046 learners entered, 30% (23 994 out of 80 046) achieved only one A-C pass and 15% (12 052 out of 80 046) had no passes (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2019^[83]). Of the students who left secondary school at this point in 2019-20, 57% went into Further Education and 18% into employment (Scottish Government, 2021^[84]). A fuller profile of achievement might provide richer information for users and serve leavers better at this stage, for example by identifying social contributions and attainments such as vocational, music, or Duke of Edinburgh awards. For

the majority who stay on into post-compulsory education, the Higher and Advanced Higher examination results are the basis for selection to university, training and employment. National 4 and 5 qualifications are not critical to these selection processes. The removal of National 5 examinations could allow more in-depth preparation for the Higher examinations.

These options are not new, they were discussed both in the design of CfE for secondary schools and at the formulation of the new National Qualifications. It appears that each time the embedded examination tradition has prevailed.

7.2.2. Developing a more resilient upper-secondary assessment system

The COVID-19 experience of 2020-2021 could stimulate the option of further developing more localised and resilient models of assessment as schooling moves back to normal levels. The lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of many qualification systems, particularly those in the United Kingdom. The cancellation of external examinations created an awarding crisis, especially in Scotland and England. The use of statistical measures at a national level worsened the crisis by alienating both students and the general public. This led to a return to the original teacher estimated grades.

The October and December cancellations of the 2021 examinations in Scotland meant that teacher assessments, based in part on SQA-issued mini-examinations and mark schemes, and on classwork, were used in the awards, as they were in Wales. While examinations were later cancelled in England, results were based on teacher assessments with ‘mini-exams’ made available by awarding bodies for optional use by teachers (Roberts and Danechi, 2021^[85]).

What has been brought into sharper focus during lockdown in the United Kingdom, with its school closures and online learning, are the disparities experienced by students, in terms of the difference in resources available for the socially advantaged and the socially disadvantaged. Examinations are only meritocratic and fair when candidates have the same opportunities to access the curriculum and examination resources. The differential learning losses in 2020 and 2021 raise the issue of who is in the best position to judge the relative attainments of students. It may well be that local solutions are more dependable.

Awards were less affected by lockdown in those ‘mixed economy’ systems where they are based on a combination of teachers’ continuous assessment, on school-based examinations as well as external examinations. The United Kingdom at present is particularly vulnerable to any disruption to the national examination system or by differential learning loss as students prepare for examinations. Schools, rather than the central agencies, have become the fallback during the present crisis and proved they could cope. For example, grades were issued without major disruption in Canada, Norway the IB, whose ‘mixed economy’ example could be the foundation of a more dependable system.

7.2.3. Seeking better alignment of assessment with curriculum and pedagogy through broadening the forms of assessment

John Biggs’ concept of constructive alignment seeks to strengthen the relationship of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment by ensuring they all pull in the same direction (Biggs and Collis, 1982^[1]). Misalignment occurs, for example, when the curriculum encourages analysis and reflection, but the examination only asks for naming or describing. Frederiksen and Collins’ systemic validity (1989^[31]) asks a similar question: does the test itself encourage the very skills it is assessing?

The policy intention for the new National Qualification was to:

“reflect the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence, and to develop skills for learning, life and work. They are supposed to have an increased emphasis on skills but still have appropriate knowledge and skills for that course area. They aim to be less prescriptive than previous qualifications as they offer flexibility, provide time for learning and have scope for personalisation and choice, especially within the coursework” (Assessment and National Qualifications Working Group, 2018, p. 2_[77]).

The National 5 and Higher and Advanced Higher examinations replaced the Standard, Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications from 2014 onwards with this intention to better align the new examinations with the approaches to teaching and learning encouraged by *Curriculum for Excellence*. Concerns remain however that the National Qualifications have done little to move away from the dominance of examination preparation, with its emphasis on memory and past paper drills, which leads to more didactic secondary school teaching. The Scottish examination system remains a relatively traditional and cautious one (Bhattacharya, 2021_[86]), which is in contrast to the pedagogy encouraged by *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Scotland has a highly centralised and regulated upper-secondary assessment regime. Given the role of Highers and Advanced Highers in the selection for university and occupational selection, this process ensures the necessary comparability of standards in assessment. The format of these relies largely on traditional pen-and-paper timed examinations under standardised conditions. As other jurisdictions, and some SQA qualifications, demonstrate, external assessments can be broader and more creative than simply traditional examinations. SQA could further develop a range of options:

- More use of Information Technology to provide online examination resources and more interactive approaches, with opportunities for candidates to use computers to respond. Relevant international examples from Norway, New Zealand, Finland, and Israel were developed in Section 3.2;
- Incorporation of e-Portfolio and personal projects for external marking (see the International Baccalaureate example in Section 3.2);
- More use of oral presentations and practicals as a way of broadening the assessment formats (see the French and International Baccalaureate examples in Section 4.2).

International evidence points to the potential of digital, AI-powered technologies to expand what skills, knowledge and attitudes assessments can measure, thus offering opportunities to bring 21st century learning and assessment closer together. Where paper-and-pencil, and even computer-based tests fail to measure higher-order skills such as creativity, or emotional and behavioural skills such as collaboration, newer technologies offer great possibilities for effective, equitable and efficient assessments. As education systems explore this potential, they must keep in mind that these technologies can only be beneficial under certain conditions, i.e. when human end users are involved and in control of decision making, when the technologies’ architecture remain transparent, and when decisions on their use are made based on reliable data (OECD, 2021_[22]).

7.2.4. Reconfiguring and increasing the role of school-based assessment and adapting the central moderation system

The more ambitious and future-oriented the curriculum and teaching, the more challenges these present to examinations, especially traditional pen-and-paper ones. In Section 5 issues about the dependability and trustworthiness of assessments were raised, particularly those

of how effectively a curriculum is sampled. The format of traditional examinations means that only a limited range of knowledge and skills can be assessed, while more complex and less tangible skills, for example collaboration and creativity, maybe excluded.

While teacher assessment plays a part in the Scottish examination system, it is generally narrowly conceived as specific pieces of coursework that are submitted and moderated by SQA. Teacher assessment can take other forms, particularly the continuous assessment of regular classroom work, which may include oral and practical work. These are central to upper-secondary student assessment in jurisdictions such as Norway, Ontario, New Zealand, and Queensland. Tests developed by teachers, possibly drawing on a central questions bank as in the reformed Baccalauréat in France, may also be part of this wider range of assessments.

Teachers in Scotland are trusted to make ongoing assessments of their pupils throughout primary and lower-secondary schooling, as are lecturers in Further and Higher Education. Upper-secondary teachers do provide coursework marks, which contribute to examination grades, though the weighting of these is relatively low, and moderation requirements are administratively demanding. This system is highly centralised and controlled in comparison to systems such as Ontario, Queensland and Norway. Even the highly centralised *Baccalauréat* is regionally assessed.

In ‘high-trust’ jurisdictions such as Norway and Canada, assessment is far more decentralised and left to schools and teachers. A source of dissatisfaction with the original National Qualifications, similar to the assessment reforms in Hong Kong, China, were the complex recording and moderation procedures. Much simpler models are used in other jurisdictions, incorporating teacher’s continuous assessment of their students based on performance over time. This allows a wider range of attainments to be incorporated. SQA’s role would then be far more ‘light touch’ in relation to National Qualifications.

Anecdotal comments collected from students during this study suggest they see exam preparation as a narrowing experience, with rote learning and memorisation a regular feature in their classes. This points to a misalignment with the curricular intentions of CfE. Providing schools with more freedom to assess the wider curriculum may increase the validity of the assessments.

In many jurisdictions, more is devolved to the school level which then generates additional assessment options:

- A more central role for continuous teacher assessment during the course based on classwork and school-based tests (see the examples of Ontario, Norway, France, and New Zealand in Section 3.3);
- Teacher set and marked work which is externally moderated by other teachers (see the example of Queensland, *ibid*);
- Oral and practical presentations which are locally set and moderated (France (Section 4.2.3), Norway Section 4.2.2).

Such approaches allow for fuller alignment with 21st century curriculum reform such as Scotland’s. As evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, these approaches also offer greater resilience where there is major disruption. Future evolutions may require Scotland to decentralise more some of its assessment procedures, while further developing teachers’ assessment literacy and the professional capacity of schools in assessment.

7.2.5. Systematically investigating students' perceptions and views of assessment arrangements

Students, as individuals, are the most affected by any assessment system and are therefore key stakeholders who need to be consulted. However, they may only have a limited voice in shaping it. The *Rapid Review of National Qualifications Experience 2020* (Priestley et al., 2020_[12]) observed:

“Young people, as stakeholder and rights holders, are at the heart of a qualifications system for schools and colleges, and need to be involved fully in decisions which affect them, in line with Scotland’s obligations to the UNCRC.” (Priestley et al., 2020, p. 47_[12]).

The authors found support from young people for achievement to be captured throughout the year, rather than the ‘two term’ dash towards examinations (in particular for Higher). The report also found:

“consistent support from all stakeholders (including young people and parents) for a reduced emphasis on terminal examinations as the basis for qualifications. There is widespread support for continuous assessment and its benefits.” (p44).

There appears to be limited systematic research evidence on how Scottish students themselves would prefer to be assessed. As Scotland is a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), fuller attention to the preferences of students would be anticipated. Evidence from consultation panels, for example SQA’s *Young Scot Vision Panel* (2018), and from interviews (OECD, 2021_[5]) also suggest young learners would prefer a greater emphasis on continuous assessments by their teachers. While these play a central role in other jurisdictions, many teachers, employers and parents in Scotland appear to be wedded to examinations and would even wish to see them at National 4.

The tensions in the system were illustrated in the 2018 *Curriculum and Assessment Board* report on National 4 Qualifications. These are not externally examined, but the report pointed that:

“a clear majority of teachers and senior managers expressed the opinion that National 4 learners needed an examination at the end of the course. Teachers commented on the need for an exam to motivate learners...” (Curriculum and Assessment Board, 2018, p. 5_[87]).

However,

“The majority of S4 learners took a different view, and this view was echoed by learners in S5 and S6. Learners judged they were working hard or very hard and did not require an external assessment at National 4” (Curriculum and Assessment Board, 2018, p. 5_[87]).

While the Scottish examination system offers students a choice of pathways and progression rates towards qualifications, it may be that, in practice, school timetables and resource constraints limit these options. If policy is to be responsive to student needs and aspirations, more systematic study of their perceptions needs support.

7.2.6. Further developing the role of vocational qualifications in broadening the curriculum

A 19th century legacy feature of the British examination system has been the privileging of academic forms of assessment, particularly the written examination, over the direct

assessment of practical or performance skills. Hanson (1993_[88]) points out that:

“Because tests act as gatekeepers to many educational and training programs ...the likelihood that someone will be able to do something, as determined by the tests, becomes more important than one’s actually doing it.” (Hanson, 1993, p. 288_[88]).

Hanson calls this the “fabricating quality of tests”. One consequence of this has been to treat the more applied vocational routes as less prestigious than the general academic routes. This may mean that students are discouraged from mixing applied and academic courses, thus narrowing their options and experiences.

With SQA being responsible for both general and vocational qualifications, Scotland is well placed to raise the profile of vocational qualifications as a way of broadening its curriculum offer and developing student capacities. There is also considerable permeability in the system for transfer within Higher Education, through such as Foundation Apprenticeships and National Progress Awards (NPAs) (Brown, 2019_[89]). One option is to further integrate them into the mainstream qualification offer. Some applied subjects can be taken as National and Higher Qualifications (for example Accounting; Care; Health and Food Technology) though these have relatively small entries. In 2019, 64 267 skill-based qualifications were achieved, easily double the figure in 2012. By 2020 this had risen to 71 723 (information provided by the SQA).

In countries such as Australia and New Zealand, vocational and academic subjects can be combined in a single mainstream qualification offer. In Ireland the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is integrated with the national Leaving Certificate and involves joint modules. It has the same status for university entrance and is taken by over a quarter of the Certificate cohort (O’Donnell, 2018_[90]). This is also the case in Norway, where 50% of students follow vocational routes at 16 which lead into either apprenticeships after two years or staying in education for three years.

New Zealand has continued with the modular system inspired by Scotland in order to provide vocational qualifications. It has gone further by encouraging the integration of general and vocational subjects in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Around one third of the 85% of students who achieve NCEA Level 2 will have at least one subject from one of the six vocational pathways.

In France, the *Baccalauréat* was broadened in 1985 to include the *Baccalauréat professionnel* (*professional Baccalaureate*) with the intention of creating parity of esteem for vocational qualifications as it would qualify successful candidates for university entrance. This is now taken by just over a quarter of the cohort, with an 80% pass rate. However, the fact that fewer than 5% of the successful students go on to become university graduates suggests parity has not been fully achieved. The *professional Baccalaureate* is currently being reformed to modernise its format (15 groups of professions instead of around 100 options currently), and to include more opportunities for workplace experience. The assessment will also include an oral presentation on a practical project the student has worked on. This will provide a more valid and fit-for-purpose qualification. Whether it improves the public status of the *professional Baccalaureate* has yet to be seen.

The historical pattern of giving preference to the written examination has left vocational education and training struggling to establish parity of esteem. The more successful approaches appear to be in those systems which have integrated both in their qualifications but, in these too, society may still value the academic strand over the vocational. Scotland is in a position to further integrate the separate qualifications and to further raise the status of vocational qualifications. In its final report, the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce observed:

“Curriculum for Excellence by its nature provides the opportunity for a more balanced and inclusive approach to academic and vocational education with the potential to blend the two to the needs of individual pupils.... Through ambitious partnership between our schools and colleges, many of our young people not inclined to pursue an academic pathway could leave school with high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market. By significantly enhancing the vocational content of the offer to pupils, we would follow the example of the best performing European countries in terms of youth employment without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age” (Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, 2014, p. 20_[91]).

To fulfil these aspirations, options may be explored to increase both the integration and status of vocational awards. This would require changes in how they are viewed by schools and parents, Higher Education selectors, and employers. In the case of selectors and employers, endorsements and training and study offers from prestigious sources may help to change the traditional British mindset.

8. Conclusions

We live in a world where the changing educational expectations of an increasingly diverse student population are reflected in curriculum reform and changing pedagogy. Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* has been recognised as a pioneering example of one such future-facing curriculum. Assessment systems around the world have often struggled to ensure constructive alignment with these educational aspirations. In jurisdictions where upper-secondary assessments have high-stakes selective and accountability functions, national examinations have often inhibited changes to teaching and learning. This is partly because the examination syllabus becomes the *de facto* curriculum and teachers switch to narrower test preparation methods with secondary years students. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 illustrated the fragility of those systems that are largely dependent on terminal examinations for secondary school students.

Examination systems are products of specific cultures and each has its own historical legacy. Scotland's system sits within the British tradition, which had its origins in the Victorian enthusiasm for written academic examinations. One legacy feature of this is the diet of central examinations at 16, even when few students now leave education at that age, and something no longer seen in most other assessment systems.

Better alignment between curriculum and examinations may result from further technical innovation, particularly online interactive approaches and resources which allow for a wider range of question types and answer formats. A more decentralised approach, in which schools share more assessment responsibilities, may also align better with the curriculum and 21st century pedagogy. This may involve rethinking SQA's demanding quality assurance and moderation processes. The cancellation of central examinations in 2020 and 2021 and the reliance on teacher assessment has shown how this is possible, as have practices in such as Ontario, New Zealand and Queensland.

Whatever routes are chosen, at the heart of any such system should be those who are most impacted: the learners being assessed. Students should have opportunities to influence assessment policies. Educational equity requires a dependable and resilient assessment system which is perceived as trustworthy by the key stakeholders in society.

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 rd September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Digitisation of the Music Service
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/2 19
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Shona Milne
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 At the Council Budget meeting of March 2021 officers were instructed to report to the Education Operational Delivery Committee on how the Music Service could use digitalisation to offer a more affordable offer to families and extend the reach of the service. Members were also keen for Officers to explore opportunities for collaboration. This report responds to that initial instruction and also updates on national policy changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee :-

- 2.1 notes the establishment of a universal offer available to all children and young people;
- 2.2 notes the general move to group lessons for learners in the Broad General Education;
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Education Officer to consult with pupils, parents and instructors in order to determine the scope of a digital anytime offer to be made available to our learners;
- 2.4 instructs the Chief Education Officer to track uptake to help evaluate the changes in service delivery; and
- 2.5 instructs the Chief Education Officer to present an evaluation of the impact of the changes to Committee within one calendar year.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 In March 2021 Members instructed the Chief Education Officer to explore how digital could be used to extend the reach of the Music Service. The aspiration was to develop a more affordable offer to families who wished their child to engage with the service.
- 3.1.2 Members also encouraged the Chief Education Officer to explore options for collaboration with other Local Authorities if this had potential to extend the offer available to children and young people.

3.2 MUSIC SERVICE DELIVERY OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS

- 3.2.1 During the pandemic music instructors have been unable to provide pupils with face to face input due to restrictions put in place in national return to school guidance. Lessons have been delivered through video links and placement of assignments in a digital classroom. Parents were not charged for Music Instruction during the first period of lockdown due to the many restrictions in place but were charged a reduced rate from January 2021. This reduced rate reflected the continued restrictions around face to face delivery.
- 3.2.2 The Music Service digital classroom continues to be available providing pupils with a reference point when practising. Despite the restrictions this approach was well received by some pupils who for the most part continued to make good progress. One parent noted that *'My son has been learning the cello for the last three years and has enjoyed it very much. Thank you to the instructors for all the hard work put in to online learning over the past year. He has enjoyed the opportunity to continue making music online with his friends.'*
- 3.2.3 Another noted that, *'My son was very engaged with his trombone throughout all of lockdown, due to the efforts of X with his online provision.'* Consistency was recognised by another, *'I appreciate the consistency that my children have had with their lessons throughout both lockdowns.'*
- 3.2.4 The period of school closure and the restrictions were not ideal for all young people, parents however appreciated opportunities being made available. *'Even though ensemble rehearsals could not happen in person, X ensured that online performance opportunities were available for my daughter.'*
- 3.2.5 *'From our perspective, the support my children have had from their music tutors has underpinned their well-being and progress through both lockdowns. The relationships have strengthened through remote learning and the patience and encouragement shown has made a substantial difference. My children were delighted to finally be able to see some of their tutors face to face very recently.'*
- 3.2.6 In order to make a comprehensive digital offer The Music Service invested time in populating increasing amounts of digital content. This included creation of a Google Site which has sections for each instrumental team and videos created for learners by Music Instructors. This resource has potential for further development to support learners as we move forward.
- 3.2.7 One key strength developed over the last 18 months has been whole class singing when singing was not allowed in schools. The service was able to deliver whole class singing when children were at home with multiple classes at once, which meant more children could engage than during an 'in person' session. This approach was highly efficient in terms of Instructor resource and offered an easily accessible universal offer to children across the City.
- 3.2.8 Big Noise have been working in Torry since 2015. During lockdown Big Noise produced short videos to support early skills in music for sharing across the city as part of the universal offer to all teachers and learners. The videos

provide 5 minute introductions to different beats and rhythms and are designed to be used as whole class teaching resource. These are to be piloted in August 2021 with a view to rolling out the offer to all schools in the second term. Officers are considering how to ensure that this offer is seen as part of the Music Service Google Site.

3.2.9 Many children and young people across the broad general education have really benefited from the service over the last 18 months although there are clear indications that some pupils prefer face to face delivery. Pupils undertaking accredited courses found remote delivery more challenging.

3.3 WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US ABOUT OUR DELIVERY?

3.3.1 In June 2021 only 461 of the 1431 pupils registered for tuition were engaging with the service. Some learners found recorded lessons challenging and preferred immediate feedback rather than feedback posted on their Google classroom. During periods when the school buildings were closed some families wanted to limit online learning and made the decision to drop out of instrument tuition. This was understandable given the circumstances and this position may change over time.

3.3.2 When families request that instrumental tuition ceases they have the option to provide a reason for stopping. In 2020-21, 159 of the families who stopped tuition provided a reason and this is shown in the table below. A comparison with data sets from previous years shows a high level of consistency in the reasons given for stopping.

Reason for stopping	Number of pupils	% of pupils ceasing tuition
Pupil felt that they were missing classroom learning in order to attend their instrumental music lesson	43	27%
Pupil didn't enjoy online learning	34	21%
Pupil did not have enough time to learn an instrument	26	16%
Pupil lost interest in learning an instrument	19	12%
Pupil left school	16	10%
The cost of tuition was too high	12	8%
The standard of service was not good enough	6	4%
The pupil will be changing to private lessons	3	2%

3.3.4 It is clear that on-line delivery didn't work well for 34 children and they chose to cease their instruction. The vast majority of pupils ceased lessons in January 2021 as fees were reintroduced, a second billing period ran from April and this charge can also be seen in the data. This tells us that cost was a significant factor for some families.

Date	August – December	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
% of total number of pupils who stopped lessons	0%	6%	43%	3%	3%	24%	16%	4%

3.3.5 Most children who dropped out were in the final years of primary schools. This has been a consistent pattern over many years. Some children, having had an opportunity to learn an instrument at primary school decide to cease instruction before heading to secondary school.

Year Group	% of total number of pupils who stopped lessons
P3	4%
P4	7%
P5	14%
P6	18%
P7	17%
S1	8%
S2	8%
S3	8%
S4	4%
S5	6%
S6	6%

3.4 CHANGE TO NATIONAL POLICY

3.4.1 In June 2021 Ministers and COSLA Leaders agreed a new policy of free music instruction. COSLA Leaders agreed to an initial one-year removal of fees for Music Instruction which will be supported by funding from the Scottish Government to allow existing levels of provision to be maintained in academic year 2021-22 as longer term plans are developed. Aberdeen City Council has received an initial grant of £168 000 to enable the implementation of free music lessons from August 2021.

3.4.2 This policy change was communicated to families at the start of this academic session. The removal of fees is likely to see demand for the service increase and 3000 children are currently on the waiting list.

3.5 MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR AUGUST 2021

3.5.1 Analysis of data around uptake raised a number of concerns regarding the equity of offer in place across the city. Local evidence would suggest that children are most likely to express a desire to learn an instrument if they see Music Instructors routinely in school and hear from peers engaging with the service. The table below shows the allocation in FTE as of August 2020.

ASG	FTE allocated to ASG August 2020	Number of pupils	% of total Music Service pupil numbers	School roll as % of city roll	% of ASG roll receiving tuition
Grammar	5.4FTE	136	25%	12%	4%
Harlaw	4.0FTE	63	11%	10%	3%
Lochside	2.0FTE	17	3%	12%	1%
Cults	5.1FTE	151	28%	9%	7%
Dyce	0.4FTE	4	1%	4%	0%
Bucksburn	1.8FTE	34	6%	8%	2%
Bridge of Don	1.2FTE	24	4%	4%	2%
Oldmachar	1.8FTE	40	7%	8%	2%
Northfield	1.6FTE	7	1%	10%	0%
St Machar	2.0FTE	13	2%	13%	0%
Hazlehead	4.0FTE	60	11%	9%	2%

3.5.2 As of June 2021, 10 schools had no offer of music instruction.

3.5.3 Given the change in national policy and need to make the service accessible to all, allocations have been reviewed for session 2021/22 to ensure that children from all schools are able to access the service.

3.5.4 Given anticipated increased demand, it is important that we offer an efficient service which maximises the benefits of Music Instruction for as many children and young people as possible. The service has reviewed the number of students each instructor supports locally and looked at available averages in other urban Local Authorities.

3.5.5 Average numbers of pupils per instructor in Aberdeen over session 2020/2021 are currently low at 17 (range of 2 – 32). Uptake and therefore offer is significantly lower in some parts of the city as shown in the table above.

3.5.6 Further analysis of the workload of each Instructor highlighted that a number of music instructors were allocated to Associated School Groups at opposite ends of the city resulting in the need for travelling time and reduction in teaching time available. This approach limited opportunities for Instructors to work and learn together. It is thought important to address this in order to reduce travelling time and creating the ability for teams across disciplines to work collegiately on bands and ensembles and share expertise with each other.

3.6 ARRANGEMENTS FOR SESSION 2021/22

3.6.1 For session 2021/22 each Associated School Group has been allocated a minimum amount of instructor time to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for pupils to access the service. The full range of instruments will be offered across each Secondary School allowing more pupils to learn their instrument of choice. This provides greater choice for young people keen to consider certification and therefore has the potential to increase levels of pupil engagement and achievement. The timing of changes has been carefully

considered to minimise the impact on SQA students who rely on building positive relationships with Instructors from the start of the school year.

3.6.2 Changes were communicated at the end of the academic session 2020/2021 to ensure that SQA students would have certainty around their instructor. This very limited timescale resulted in the service having to move at pace to ensure that arrangements were communicated and in place for the beginning of the new academic session.

3.6.3 The changes have received a mixed response with extremely positive comments from those who will be able to access the service for what they perceive to be the first time but some anxiety from parents and carers who have been advised of staffing changes. All families have been assured that if they currently receive a service this will continue to be available.

3.6.4 The music service consists of 32 instructors in total offering lessons across all disciplines. This represents a total workforce of 29 FTE.

Discipline	Number of instructors
Brass	5
Guitar	4
Piano	3
Strings	6
Woodwind	5
Singing	3
Piping	1
Percussion	5

3.6.5 The service has undertaken some benchmarking to better understand the optimal capacity of the service and has looked at pre-pandemic data.

Local authority	Average pupil numbers in 2018-19 per instructor (<i>pre-Covid19</i>)
Aberdeen City	72
Glasgow	103
Dundee	175
Renfrewshire	157
North Lanarkshire	122
East Renfrewshire	119
Edinburgh	92
Inverclyde	93
Aberdeenshire	79

3.6.6 Aberdeen City Music Service had the lowest number of pupils per instructor of all urban Local Authorities and it will be important to address this given anticipated increased demand. A maximum of 100 pupils per instructor is thought reasonable having taken account of instructor timetables, previous numbers supported by the service and the level pupils are studying at. This is in line with Glasgow City Council who averaged 103 pupils per instructor in 2018/2019. This will be kept under review.

- 3.6.7 Given that each tutor currently supports (on average) 17 pupils, this provides a great deal of capacity to help meet increased demand.
- 3.6.8 As a result, officers believe that the potential capacity of the service is 3000 and instructors have been set a target of 2490 for session 21/22 and 3000 for session 22/23. It is proposed that digital resources support this increase in order to provide pupils with access to additional practice materials.

3.7 CORE AND FLEXIBLE ALLOCATIONS FOR AUGUST 2021

- 3.7.1 In order to ensure that the Service is well placed to deliver national and local policy, a core allocation of Instructors has been awarded to all Associated Schools groups. Allocations have been developed by ensuring that all secondary schools receive the full range of instruments offered and each primary school receives a minimum allocation. Each instructor's timetable will allow enough time to make a visit viable (i.e. minimum of one morning/afternoon per school visit).
- 3.7.2 Flexible/agile allocations have been made based upon the need of pupils currently learning a musical instrument to ensure that they continue to be able to access Instruction in their chosen instrument. These flexible allocations will be kept under continual review and will help take account of current ensemble arrangements.

ASG	Core FTE allocation August 2021	Flex/agile allocation August 2021
Grammar	1.7FTE	1.3FTE
Harlaw	1.8FTE	0.8FTE
Lochside	2.2FTE	0.1FTE
Cults	1.5FTE	1.1FE
Dyce	1FTE	0.1FTE
Bucksburn	1.7FTE	0.4FTE
Bridge of Don	1.2FTE	0.3FTE
Oldmachar	1.9FTE	0.4FTE
Northfield	2.7FTE	0.1FTE
St Machar	2.2FTE	0.1FTE
Hazlehead	2.7FTE	0.8FTE

- 3.7.3 There is some FTE not included on the table above as this is used for Youth Music Initiative (YMI) projects which move between schools throughout the year. Each school receives an equal amount of YMI time under this scheme. The scheme is funded by Creative Scotland.
- 3.7.4 This approach to allocation will be kept under review as the scale of demand for free music instruction is as yet unknown. The YMI offers a good opportunity to advertise the service and share details of the offer with our children and young people.

3.8 COLLABORATION WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 3.8.1 The Chief Officer, as instructed, engaged in discussions with Highland Council in order to consider the development of a partnership model for expanding digital delivery. It was thought that a digital service could be developed and offered within Aberdeen City and Highland but also offered outwith to help off-set costs.
- 3.8.2 Highland Council and Aberdeen City Council remain keen to collaborate in order to widen access to learning, celebrate our culture and support economic recovery for the future. Both education services have made highly effective use of G Suite tools to support the delivery of the curriculum and are well placed to collaborate.
- 3.8.3 The announcement of free music tuition for all and the publication of the OECD report in June has led to uncertainty. There is anecdotal evidence that many Local Authorities are developing digital solutions and Education Scotland are currently working to bring all parties together to ensure that offers are not duplicated. There are also indications of an expectation that all digital offers will be free to access.
- 3.8.4 As a result of the uncertainty, and the need to prioritise preparations for the new term, work in this area has paused until we gain further clarity. Officers would hope to have a clearer national picture in the coming months.

3.9 PROPOSALS FOR THE SERVICE IN THE LONGER TERM

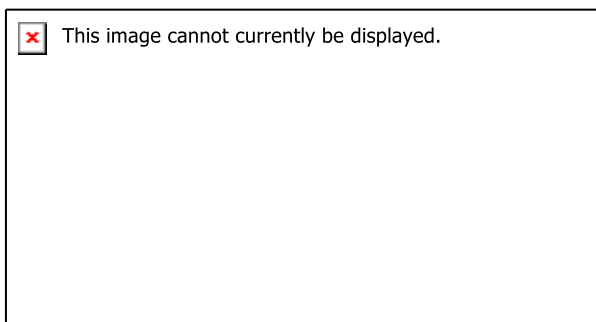
- 3.9.1 The service has identified that it has a potential capacity of 3000. 1431 young people are already registered for the service. The announcement of free music tuition is likely to lead to a significant rise in demand for the service. 3000 children are currently sitting on the waiting list for Music Tuition and this is likely to rise. The service will develop tracking and monitoring arrangements to ensure that it is well placed to identify patterns in demand so that the service can adapt appropriately.
- 3.9.2 A universal offer of Instruction will be available to all schools remotely. This will include the Big Noise offer, some of the singing resources already available on the service Google Site and some percussion workshops. This offer will be available to all schools and can be supported by class teachers and will not require children to be registered with the Music Service. It is hoped this approach will see increased numbers of children develop an interest in Music Instruction where opportunities have been limited previously.
- 3.9.3 It is proposed that the Google Site be further developed in collaboration with children and young people to ensure that practice lessons are available to all children and young people which can be accessed at any time. Some children leave the service as they don't like missing time with their peers in class and this digital anytime offer will allow children and young people to access instruction from either school or home. This resource would help children progress through the early stages of the grading system by incrementally learning and practicing skills. This offer would be available to all children registered with the Music Service and could be accessed either at school or at

home. This would help provide a more structured skills practice for all and could help children progress more quickly.

- 3.9.4 In order to future proof the delivery of music instruction it is important that we develop models of delivery to include delivery of live lessons through video link in order to increase opportunities for learners to work collaboratively and maximise instructor time. This would not remove 'in person' learning, rather look to a blended approach where tutors are present for some lessons and others are delivered digitally. This would also allow Instructors to engage with children from different schools at the same time. This model is used in a number of other Local Authorities and many others are beginning to adopt this approach. This work will be subject to on-going evaluation over the coming year to ensure that we find the optimum balance.
- 3.9.5 Working with groups has always been part of the service offer however it can present challenges for instructors who are used to working with individuals. In order to expand the service and meet demand it is essential that group delivery becomes the norm across the Broad General Education. Music Instructors will be guided to develop approaches to group delivery over the coming session.
- 3.9.6 In order to continue to showcase the work of young people and share successes with their communities, there is a need to increase opportunities for bands and ensembles in localities where this has not been previously available. Children and young people value the opportunity to come together to play. Children who attend group lessons and those who benefit from the digital anytime offer, would therefore be afforded opportunities to play together with a wider group of learners.
- 3.9.7 The research around learning a musical instrument shows a direct link to raising attainment and engagement for some young people. The service will develop approaches and systems to allow School Leadership Teams to access targeted tuition as part of wider initiative to raise attainment and support engagement in learning for our most vulnerable learners. This is a new approach but one with the potential to support a further closing of the gap for some children.
- 3.9.8 Monitoring data and performance will be of critical importance over the coming year. It is important that the service adapt to changing demand based on local data. A tracking system to measure % of uptake by school, % of pupils with protected characteristics receiving lessons, pupil progress and impact of tuition on learner engagement will be established and monitored.
- 3.9.9 It is proposed that an evaluation of the service be presented to Committee within one calendar year to determine next steps.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In keeping with most other Councils, a charge was previously made for Music Instruction. The national policy of free Music Instruction will be implemented and £168,000 has been awarded to Aberdeen City Council to offset any loss.
- 4.2 The table below outlines the costs of the service, staff costs including the coordinator and all administration associated with the service. During the pandemic the service experienced a significant reduction in fees due to the reasons explained above. The award from Scottish Government will be used to offset the cost of loss of fees.



- 4.3 The Scottish Government have indicated that Local Authorities who previously charged for music lessons (of which Aberdeen City Council was one) will be able to access “top up” funding to cover shortfalls in income. However figures have yet to be confirmed along with any longer-term funding strategy.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Authority has many legal duties including those of:
- The Education(Scotland) Act 1980
 - The Education(Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Act 2004
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- 5.2 The approach being taken to offer music instruction outlined in this Report will assist the Council, as Education Authority, to fulfil these duties more effectively, and secure necessary and appropriate music instruction for pupils across the city.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	Risk that an equitable offer will not be made available to all communities across the city	L	Implementation of the staffing allocation as outlined in this report

Compliance	Failure to offer free access to free Instrumental Instruction as per national policy		Implementing tracking arrangements as outlined in this report. Increasing access to digital resources and group lessons to help manage demand.
Operational	Failure to meet demand for a service	M	Implementing tracking arrangements as outlined in this report. Increasing access to digital resources and group lessons to help manage demand.
Financial	Scottish Government funding may not cover the budgeted income and continued staffing costs resulting in financial pressure	M	Continue to work with COSLA and the Scottish Government as they have committed to work with Local Authorities to develop a model for a longer term sustainable instrumental music tuition service which includes sustainable funding.
Reputational	Failure to meet demand for a service	L	Monitoring uptake and promoting agility in the service.
Environment / Climate	None identified		

7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report support the delivery of Policy Statement 7 – Commit to closing the attainment gap in education. The paper asks the committee to note the establishment of a universal offer available to all children and young people and the general move to group lessons for learners in the Broad General Education.

Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcome	The proposals within this report support the stretch outcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report support the delivery of nearly all Children and Young people stretch outcomes in the LOIP. The paper seeks to inform how the service will provide an equitable offer of music instruction across the city. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026. • 90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. • As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. • 95% of children living in our priority localities will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. • Child friendly city where all decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	N/A

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Following an assessment no DPIA required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

None.

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Senior Phase
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/218
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Alex Duncan
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Education Operational Delivery Committee of 26th November 2020 considered a report on the Senior Phase and asked Officers to report progress within 3 Committee cycles. This report aims to share progress to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 note the progress made since November 2020;
- 2.2 note the proposed use of the Education Recovery Grant;
- 2.3 endorse the establishment of a yearly 'Lift Off' event to support young people in the senior phase;
- 2.4 instruct the Chief Education Officer to report on-going progress to Committee through the Education Improvement Journey reports; and
- 2.5 instruct the Chief Education Officer to routinely update Committee of proposed local changes in light of changes to national policy resulting from the Scottish Government response to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 Secondary schools operate two broad curriculum stages. A Broad General Education is provided for those in S1 and S3 with a more personalised Senior Phase offering made to young people from S4. In real terms secondary schools start to include an element of choice into the S3 curriculum to ensure that young people are well prepared for the Senior Phase.

- 3.1.2 The report of 26th November 2020 appended an analysis of performance across the Senior Phase and identified a number of vulnerabilities to be addressed in the short, medium and longer term. Officers worked with head teachers to identify how best to proceed given the rapidly changing situation resulting from the pandemic. This was important to ensure that school staff were able to manage and implement the changes given the challenges of implementing the

Alternative Certification Model, movement between traditional educational delivery and remote delivery and the on-going management of Public Health investigations and subsequent periods of self-isolation for pupils. Despite the challenges of the last year a number of areas identified in the report of November 2020 have been progressed. These changes have aided improvement in attainment in 2021.

3.2 **THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABZ WORKS** [ABZ WORKS – Your route to skills, training and work.](#)

- 3.2.1 The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the local economy with the loss of employment opportunities. The opportunities available to young people in some sectors continues to change and this uncertainty presents a number of challenges for young people, their families and for staff working to support young people into a positive destination. Head teachers and central staff were keen to develop a, 'single point of truth' to enable young people to make choices with more confidence.
- 3.2.2 Head teachers and Officers from across education and City Growth have collaborated with a range of partners to develop a one-stop-shop website, known as ABZ Works. The website provides local accessible information and was launched officially in August 2021 after soft market testing with young people in June 2021 and direct development with some of our Care Experienced young people.
- 3.2.3 In response to Skills Development Scotland's Regional Skills Assessment data for Aberdeen, as well as local drivers, the following sectors were identified for the first phase of the website; Care and Early Learning and Childcare, Life Sciences, Tourism, Hospitality, Energy, Construction and Digital.
- 3.2.4 Aberdeen City Council has worked in partnership with NorthEast Scotland College (NESCol), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Bon Accord Care, The Developing the Young Workforce Board, universities and other training providers to show pathways into these sectors through apprenticeships, college and university courses and other work-based qualifications. These career pathways, represented through animations and graphics have been developed with our website users clearly in mind.
- 3.2.5 As a dynamic platform, the website will be continually refreshed allowing Officers to add and change content. Resource has been allocated to help maintain the site in the longer term.
- 3.2.6 One of the other key functions of the website is to communicate the additional skills that will be required to succeed in any future jobs including meta-skills or future skills to ensure that young people can thrive within a shifting labour market. Skills like emotional intelligence, the ability to collaborate within a team and critical thinking are even more desirable now and it is important that our learners recognise the importance of these skills.
- 3.2.7 The third key function is to take an eco-system approach with employers, training providers, universities and wider support services with the young

person at the centre. This area will continue to be developed over the coming months and years to ensure that we work as a wider system to support our young people.

- 3.2.8 The website and our collaborative social media efforts reflect our focus on producing content that resonates with our key users. Young people have been able to co-produce content and provide direct feedback on the navigation, content, visual identity and design elements of the website.

3.3 ACCESSING ACCURATE AND TIMELY DATA

- 3.3.1 The Senior Phase Committee report, 26 November 2020 highlighted how data releases at different times of the year and a lack of a citywide data system can present challenges as issues become apparent too late and remedial action cannot be taken. This is partly due to data being sent directly by assessment centres (schools) to the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

- 3.3.2 Head teachers and Officers agreed that investing time in the development of a citywide system would aid our work to deliver the Alternative Certification Model in the short term and in raising attainment in the longer term by taking advantage of visual representations to highlight improvement trends and any emerging risks. Having a platform to highlight risks enables the provision of appropriate interventions.

- 3.3.3 Officers in Data and Insight have collaborated with representative head teachers to develop a PowerBi dashboard. The PowerBi platform has enabled the analysis of;

- whole school data (breadth and depth),
- subject by subject historical data, and
- pivot table analysis with individual pupil data sets.

- 3.3.4 In the words of one of the representative head teachers, '*this is the game changer*'.

- 3.3.5 The graphical trend data has helped schools and the Central Team to carry out moderation and quality assurance process as part of the wider ACM and this has helped address some of the issues raised in the November report. The presentation of data has enabled groups of specialists across all secondary schools to come together and share expertise and best practice. This collaborative approach will be maintained.

- 3.3.6 Breadth, depth and subject data has enabled the identification of trends around A-D awards, presentation rates and no awards. Having access to this data at a school level enabled anomalies to be quickly identified and addressed and resulted in more robust and quality assured data being submitted.

- 3.3.7 The data has supported informed discussions and helped pose questions, resulting in a rich and purposeful interrogation of the data and ultimately helping to inform a narrative around each schools' set of results. These discussions will inform quality improvement activity over academic session 2021/22.

- 3.3.8 The accessibility of the PowerBi data, along with its user-friendly platform, opens up wider possibilities. There is the potential to incorporate wider achievement data, as well as using the platform to track and analyse data throughout the academic session. This development has the potential to aid curricular design and monitoring of student achievement as outlined in the OECD report. The Quality Improvement Manager – Raising Attainment will support this development to ensure that we achieve the ultimate aim of one single system from 3-18.
- 3.3.9 A Power BI licence is now in place for all Education staff. This will help individual staff members see how their class data impacts on department, school and Local Authority data.
- 3.3.10 The Power Bi platform has capability to inform, analyse and improve practice at all levels of the school system from class teacher, Principal Teachers and Senior Leadership Teams as well as the Central Officers. It has helped address many of the issues raised in the November report and head teachers and central education officers are extremely grateful of the significant time investment in this process by colleagues in Data and Insights.

3.4 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FURTHER EDUCATION

- 3.4.1 An automatic pathway to a full-time college course has been offered to young people across the city who were unable to complete courses at college over session 20/21. This offer is made regardless of the outcome of their results at the end of 20/21.
- 3.4.2 NESCol have pledged to work with every pupil to find the right place at College for them in their chosen field. That may be through a full-time place at College or, if a pupil intends to remain at school, a further School Links course.
- 3.4.3 Analysis of the data shows clear evidence of improvement emerging at Northfield Academy. Despite the significant changes in approach to supporting wellbeing, the Head teacher is clear that the curriculum requires a more significant restructure to help break some historic cycles. It is thought that this can be realised by working more closely with NESCol and other partners.
- 3.4.4 A Strategic group is being established to consider more fully the aspirations of the community at Northfield (young people and parents and carers) to help design an offer more suited to their interests and ambitions.
- 3.4.5 A Co-design approach is being proposed to ensure that stakeholders are more directly involved in decision making with governance moving away from more traditional approaches to ensure that the community itself has the opportunity to drive the changes. The Northfield project will provide an opportunity to formalise curriculum review based on data and in keeping with the OECD recommendations for a national cycle of curriculum review.
- 3.4.6 This is likely to lead to a gap analysis driving the offer from August 2022 and changes in how school-based courses are delivered, it could also inform how finance is used, how education across the senior phase is structured and help

provide direct pathways into employment and further training. Other parties including the NHS Youth Academy are interested in collaborating around a potential health and care pathway and this work is being progressed at pace.

- 3.4.7 As a result of external verification in May 2019 the SQA have confirmed that Northfield Academy will be used as an example of good practice, based on the digital delivery of Northfield's Creative Industries course, and has now been published on the SQA website.

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/98437.html>

3.5 BROADENING THE OFFER AVAILABLE

- 3.5.1 Secondary schools continue to develop and expand the senior phase curricular offer and work with partners to develop appropriate curricular pathways for all students. St Machar Academy, for example, have realised a significant improvement in attainment by using pupil tracking data from the Broad General Education (S1-S3) to inform the development and creation of appropriate curriculum pathways in S4 and the senior phase.
- 3.5.2 This approach has brought the introduction of the Employability Pathway in S4 and the first Foundation Apprenticeship partnership in Early Education & Childcare with Aberlour.
- 3.5.3 The Employability Pathway targets learners who plan to leave school following S4 and builds in additional opportunities to develop skills for life, learning & work.
- 3.5.4 The Foundation Apprenticeships delivered in St Machar Academy break traditional boundaries and in agreement with SDS and Aberlour the school delivered the traditional two-year programme within one year. This required careful planning, a creative school timetable and targeting the correct learners. This format has been extremely successful and is now the blue-print for all Foundation Apprenticeships at St Machar Academy. These approaches will be shared with all secondary schools to ensure that we spread this excellent practice.
- 3.5.5 St Machar Academy are also piloting an innovative construction pathway for students who wish to pursue a career in the construction industry through a Level 5 Construction Foundation Apprenticeship. St Machar Academy, NESCOL and Robertson's Construction are partnering to offer a 1-year construction pathway for students in their final year of secondary school. Participation in the pathway will provide a range of certificates and qualifications that will make successful students some of the most employable young people within Aberdeen City.
- 3.5.6 In addition to the partnership work at individual school level, collaboration continues city wide with Community Planning Partners. A Senior Phase Curriculum Mapping group is being established to coordinate the curricular requirements and offers from partners in line with secondary school subject choice processes. A representative group of secondary school senior leaders

will meet on a regular basis between August and December 2021 to determine the course demand from students and provide informed data to partner providers to plan accordingly for session 22/23.

3.5.7 The AspireNorth programme has been operational for a number of years at Northfield, Lochside and St Machar Academies. Cohorts of 15 - 30 pupils from each year group (S3 to S6) are identified to participate as having the potential to achieve Higher Education entry but are at risk of not achieving this potential or do not recognise their potential for progression to Higher Education.

3.5.8 The programme offers:

- one-to-one action planning for pupils
- campus visits and taster days
- graduate workplace links
- residential events
- preparation for application to Higher Education
- interview preparation
- development of study skills
- preparation for student life

3.5.9 50% of pupils who take part in the programme are progressing to Higher Education directly from school with a further 25% to Further Education as a stepping stone to Higher Education.

3.5.10 The programme is to be extended to Harlaw and Hazlehead Academies in session 2021/22 and will then be further extended to all young people across the city fulfilling the criteria from session 22/23.

3.6 SUPPORTING A POSITIVE TRANSITION

3.6.1 The Senior Phase Committee report, 26 November highlighted concerns that young people were being impacted by the negative terminology being used around, 'loss of learning' and being the 'lost generation'.

3.6.2 All head teachers and officers agreed that this area required to be prioritised to ensure that young people could feel more optimistic about their future. It was agreed that a senior phase transition event would be most helpful. With the support of Developing Young Workforce NE Board (DYWNE), Skills Development Scotland and a variety of keynote speakers including Carl Walz, former NASA astronaut, 50 employers and providers provided an extensive menu of recorded presentations for young people to engage with over two virtual induction days.

3.6.3 'Lift Off!' was our first online induction event for the senior students of Aberdeen City and who now, more than ever, need us to work together to help them prepare for this next phase in their journey. The on-line event promoted post-school pathways for new S5 and S6 pupils from across Aberdeen and highlighted the unique skills young people have acquired over the 18 months and led young people to consider their CV more fully. The event was used not only to promote career pathways, but also to identify additional support services

available to young people as they move on from school and to build on employer engagement and relationships.

The approach taken to the development and further improvement of Lift Off is in keeping with the recommendation from the OECD report around consultation and engagement with stakeholders.

- 3.6.4 A significant aim of the day was to change the narrative around the future employment prospects of young people, to reaffirm that there are still opportunities in the oil and gas industry and future opportunities in renewables, and to encourage young people that Aberdeen remains a city of opportunity for them and their families.
- 3.6.5 The event was used to test the ABZWorks website with a group of the city's young people and gather valuable feedback. A third day was built into the event and this was used to showcase the support available to young people who had left education, particularly those participating in the Young Person Guarantee, but more broadly services available from training providers across the city.
- 3.6.6 Several meetings took place with school colleagues, Skills Development Scotland, DYW partners and employers to help facilitate this event which led to the development of a website to host video presentations from a selection of employers and further education providers, as well as videos from keynote speakers.
- 3.6.7 The event was attended by 50% of all of Aberdeen's S5 and S6 pupils with an analysis of feedback available in Appendix A. Feedback is very positive from pupils, providers, and schools with evidence of a strong desire for a similar event next year. With Committee approval officers will begin preparations now for a similar event next year.
- 3.6.8 Officers from education and City Growth are exploring with DYWNE about how to re-engage with employers to support them with a return to on-site work experience. Feedback from young people is that the challenges with on-line work experience is that it does not always provide the hands-on opportunities that engages the participant.

3.7 CONSIDERING FUTURE DIGITAL DELIVERY MODELS

- 3.7.1 At the time of writing the November 2020 report, Officers suspected that a digital offer in some subject areas would be welcomed. Parents and carers and young people have since expressed concerns about how some of the restrictions of the last year have impacted their education experience. These particularly relate to the inability to access courses in other schools, at college or experience workplaces. The appetite from young people for courses not delivered on site in their local school has reduced and as a result we have developed this area with some caution.
- 3.7.2 The City Campus model provides access to selected courses which traditionally have low uptakes in single schools. These courses are offered to all city students as part of the City Campus to ensure that the opportunity is available to young people. This provision is offered on a Monday am /Wednesday pm

and Tuesday am/Thursday pm. The Northern Alliance plan to pilot a digital programme of courses to correspond to the City Campus timetabled times providing a greater breadth of choice for young people and complimenting the range of courses within the Aberdeen City Campus programme.

- 3.7.3 Further analysis and evaluation of the City Campus model will be undertaken to determine the extent to which digital delivery could be extended further and Officers are currently planning how this academic year can be used to prepare for a potentially innovative offer by exploring the new technologies which could captivate our young people through Virtual Reality. The majority of City Campus courses are delivered from Aberdeen Grammar School (AGS) and a group of staff from AGS are working with us to plan a 'Classroom for the Future'. This will see us work closely with Microsoft to ensure that we benefit from their international perspective. Officers hope that a refreshed offer will be available from the change of timetable for session 2022/23.

3.8 ANALYSIS OF DESTINATIONS DATA

- 3.8.1 Officers continue to monitor school leavers data carefully given the changes in the local economy. The School Leaver Follow Up survey is carried out by Skills Development Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government at the beginning of June and runs through to the beginning of October and is currently ongoing. Scottish Government publish the data in mid-February.
- 3.8.2 Those in a negative destination are case managed by SDS and City Growth colleagues (No One Left Behind). SDS provide a work coach to all 16-18 year olds and beyond for care experienced young people. Additionally, those seeking work, are supported by the SDS Next Steps service.
- 3.8.3 Destinations change routinely in light of employment offers and successful enrolment in further and higher education with most change seen from August through to late September.
- 3.8.4 Although no firm conclusions can be drawn currently, there are several positives that seem to be coming through. There are already 136 young people who have moved into employment which is 10 up on where the survey finished in 2019/20. This would suggest that there are more employment opportunities available to young people than at the same point last year.
- 3.8.5 The analysis of the August data indicates an improving picture at Northfield Academy which at this point is looking at a 14% rise in positive destinations. Historically Northfield would have had more young people into employment but last year these opportunities just were not available.
- 3.8.6 There are currently a high number of school leavers who had not had a forward status recorded at the time their school leaving date was entered. 571 didn't have a forward status recorded at beginning of July but as of 9th August this has been reduced to 102 and the figure now sits at 25. This is a key learning point for future years and Officers will ensure that schools record future status when known at the same time as entering the school leaving date. This will feature in the new Pathway Planning process outlined in 3.9 below.

3.8.7 Leaver Follow Up Numbers as of August 2021 are detailed in the tables below.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Aberdeen City Leavers	1678	1453	1364

3.8.8 A reduction in leavers is evident with more young people choosing to remain in school for longer. Details of current destination status are listed below but these are likely to change over the coming weeks.

	City	City	09/08/2021	08/09/2021
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2020-21
Employment	297	126	136	168
Further Education	561	454	386	430
Higher Education	665	690	565	630
Personal Social Development	7	3	8	10
Voluntary Work	9	4	3	3
Training	34	35	46	47
Unemployed, not seeking (economically inactive, unavailable ill health)	24	36	38	34
Unemployed seeking	67	76	55	46
Unconfirmed	14	29	17	14
Moved outwith Scotland			8	10
School pupil status but leave date entered			102	25
TOTAL COHORT	1678	1453	1364	1430

3.8.9 Further analysis of leavers data will be undertaken when finalised data is published.

3.9 PATHWAY PLANNING PROCESS

- 3.9.1 The November report made clear that the coordination of resources around the senior phase (including the role of the DYW Co-ordinators) would be critical in maximising our collective endeavours for our young people.
- 3.9.2 Officers have led the establishment of a clarified pathway planning process to make sure that young people gain the support they require when transitioning out of school. A Terms of Reference has been agreed to clarify the roles and remits of all partners involved in the Pupil Pathway Planning process.
- 3.9.3 The collaborative approach taken will lead to greater consistency of approach and greater transparency in the longer term. It will also enable the sharing of good practice to ensure even more young people in Aberdeen head towards a positive and sustained post-school destination. Schools and partners are confident that there is now a consistent approach to the pathway planning process and that all parties are clearer of the roles everyone plays.

3.10 USE OF THE COVID RECOVERY GRANT

- 3.10.1 The education service has a Grant to support COVID-19 recovery of £1.9m. Similar (albeit significantly smaller) grants have been made to health. It is widely accepted that children and young people will not learn if their wellbeing has been compromised and a number of factors were considered in determining the best use of this one-off funding including:
- Anticipated changes in how services will be delivered in the longer term
 - The increased agility evident across the education service enabled by the improved use of live data.
 - Appreciation that many of the issues faced by children begin in early childhood and an attempt to get ahead of the root cause would help build more sustainable change in the longer term.
 - An appreciation that many of the stresses and strains impacting families are financial/poverty related.
- 3.10.2 Consideration has been given to the types of roles more likely to help children, young people and families at this moment in time. It is proposed that the Grant be used to:
- Establish youth work provision across all Associated School Groups to support those at risk of disengaging from around P6 upwards with a remit around engagement, substance misuse and supporting wellbeing. 20 youth workers are currently being recruited.
 - Establish a Family Learning worker allocation across all ASGs with a particular (although not exclusive) focus on Early Learning and Childcare and primary. Close alignment with universal health services will be critical as well as clear routes to the Fit Like Hubs and other early intervention services.
 - Improving access to Play Therapists
 - Improving access to financial inclusion services to improve knowledge and uptake of entitlements

- Improve supports available to families of children with additional support needs

- 3.10.3 It is proposed that physical resource will be allocated to each Associated Schools Group based on school roll. Resource can be supplemented further through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding if required. Agreements on approaches and prioritisation will be through the Partnership Forum which already provides a multi-disciplinary forum for action.
- 3.10.4 A clear evaluation framework has been developed and will be supported by live data. This approach will enable multi-disciplinary teams to be bolder in approach and allow impactful practice to be more easily spread.
- 3.10.5 The service continues to consider the changing needs of children and families. Work is currently on-going with partners to identify the supports which could be put in place to support families impacted by additional support needs and disability.

3.11 EXCELERATE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WOOD FOUNDATION

- 3.11.1 The Wood Foundation operate a programme called, 'Excelerate'. Excelerate is an investment in empowering transformational system change in education, drawing upon international systems of innovative learning and teaching.
- 3.11.2 The programme places partnerships at the heart of education, creating a collective sense of responsibility to prepare our young people for the world of work and is fully funded by The Wood Foundation.
- 3.11.3 Excelerate aims to better realise the potential of Curriculum for Excellence, improving young people's preparedness for work through skills-focussed, contextualised learning approaches.
- 3.11.4 Professional learning and collaboration are key tenets of the Excelerate network and underpin its foundations and informs ongoing success.
- 3.11.5 The Wood Foundation invests in teachers to empower them to develop and deliver a curriculum that is fit for now and the future; to nurture young people, build their skills, and provide them with experiences that will motivate and engage.
- 3.11.6 Seven secondary schools applied to participate in the Wood Excelerate Programme. Following a robust selection process which benefited from international expertise, 4 schools have been accepted onto the programme in 2021/22. Schools involved this academic year are:
- St Machar Academy
 - Oldmachar Academy
 - Bucksburn Academy
 - Harlaw Academy
- 3.11.7 The programme formally begins in September. The 4 schools will be supported over the year to set their own improvement/innovation targets. This significant investment from The Wood Foundation has the potential to

help schools explore the art of the possible and the service is extremely grateful for the opportunity the programme presents.

3.12 COP 26

- 3.12.1 In the run up to COP26, Aberdeen City schools will participate in the “Hydrogen Fuel Cell STEM Workshops - The 7 Cities Hydrogen Challenge”.
- 3.12.2 The Hydrogen Challenge is a hands-on “design, build, race, repeat” team exercise in which participants are tasked with creating the most energy efficient hydrogen fuel cell vehicle using LEGO components and miniature (yet fully functional) hydrogen technology.
- 3.12.3 2021 is a big year for promoting Hydrogen and Fuel Cells to a global audience, in particular surrounding and in the lead up to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Workshops have been specially adapted to include Aberdeen-specific content, informing students of the projects taking place around them and inspiring the next generation of renewable energy engineers, guiding them towards careers in engineering, environmental sciences and the development of cleaner, greener transport.
- 3.12.4 The Challenge culminates in an Inter-School City Final at the Beach Ballroom and an Inter-City Grand Final currently scheduled to be held in Glasgow at the end of October.

3.13 WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CHANGES SO FAR?

- 3.13.1 There is clear evidence of improved attainment across the senior phase with an improvement of over 5% in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses from last year. Although the assessment methodologies are different and are therefore not directly comparable, considerable improvement is evident in the pass rates and attainment grades as well as across our priority areas.
- 3.13.2 There is evidence of a closing of the gap (likely supported by improved pathway planning and data monitoring) and a similar closing of the gap evident when looking at attainment data of Care Experienced young people. Analysis is on-going and will be concluded following the publication of Insight data.

3.14 NEXT STEPS

- 3.14.1 Members will be aware of the OECD Report published in June 2021. This report is likely to have significant implications for the senior phase across all schools and Officers will continue to develop approaches in keeping with the vulnerabilities identified in the November report, up to date data and the policy changes resulting from the report from the OECD.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority has many legal duties including those of:

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980

- Duty of Education Authority to provide adequate and efficient school education for our area

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000

- Raising standards
- Requirement that education be provided in mainstream schools
- Education Authorities are under a duty to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of education of school education which is provided in the schools managed by them and to carry out the duty with a view to achieving the strategic priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

- Duties with regard to meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Operational	Risk of not having capacity in all subject areas to deliver on the curriculum.	L	Mitigated by sharing expertise across schools and partner providers. Collaborative working will be key.
	Risk of not achieving positive outcomes for all young people.	M	Mitigated by using data to inform curriculum offer and working to ensure courses on offer reflect the demands of the local economy in terms of skill set.
Financial	Risk of not having sufficient resource	L	Mitigated by realigning services to better meet the needs of our young

			people in Aberdeen City. Working with partner providers and supporting the continued collaboration between schools to maximise available resources.
Reputational	Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners by not ensuring equity in terms of access to a suitable curriculum.	M	Ensuring appropriate planning, tracking and monitoring to enable all young people to make informed choices in regard to subject choices and pathways.
Environmental / Climate	N/A	N/A	N/A

7. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN	
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Ensuring a curriculum that is fit for purpose, by providing flexible pathways and considering the local economy, will contribute towards an increase in employment.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Working with partner providers to develop a senior phase that meets the needs of all learners will help to support our young people into positive sustainable destinations.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	Underpinning the work of all schools in Aberdeen City is achieving excellence and equity for all.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	<p>The Education (Scotland) Act 1980</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duty to provide adequate and efficient education for our area. <p>The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duties with regard to meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs. <p>The Equality Act 2010</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duty to ensure we are not discriminating disabled learners

	<p>The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising standards • Requirement that education be provided in mainstream schools <p>The National Improvement Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Authorities are under a duty to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of education of school education which is provided in the schools managed by them and to carry out the duty with a view to achieving the strategic priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework.
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8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

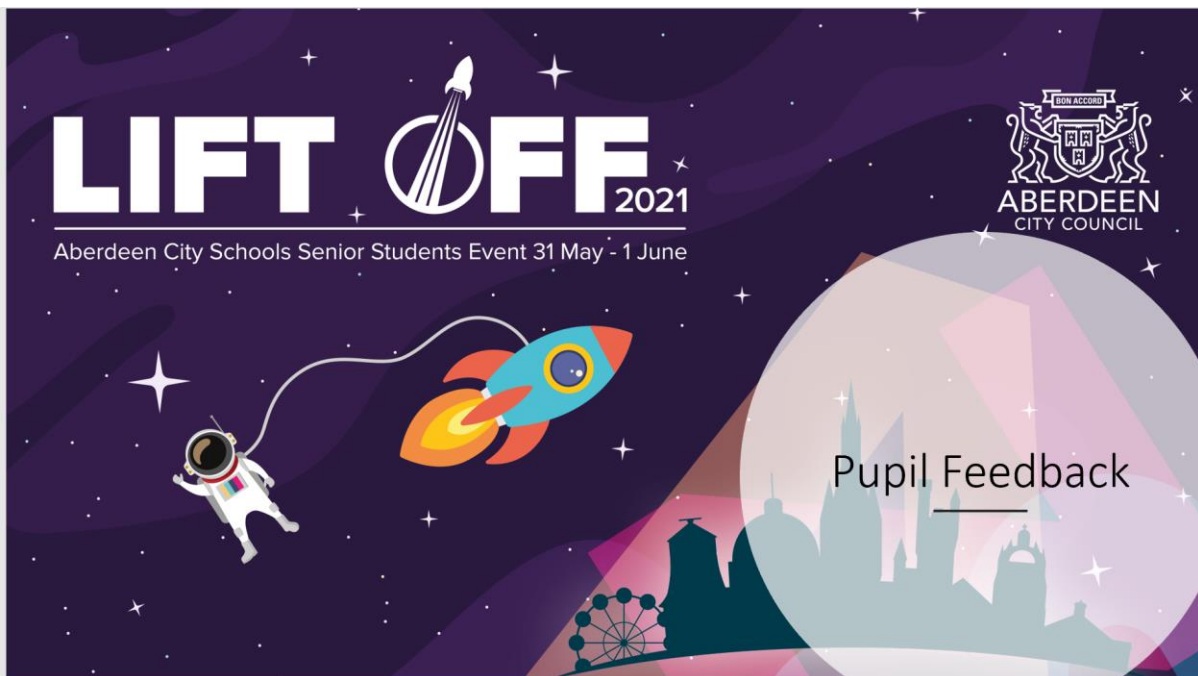
10. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Lift off evaluation

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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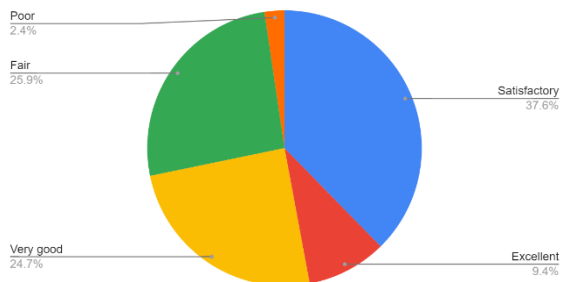
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Young people were asked to evaluate all aspects of the Lift Off event. All feedback has been summarised below to help determine next steps.

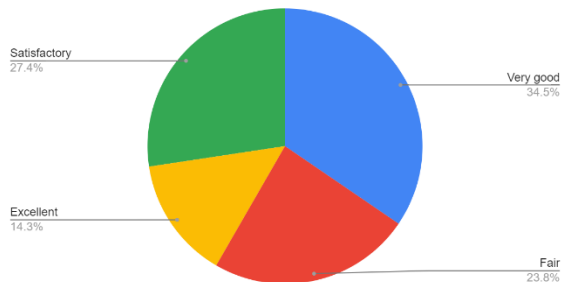
How helpful was the video recorded introduction to the Event from Aberdeen City Council?

How engaging did you find the introductory presentation from Aberdeen City Council?



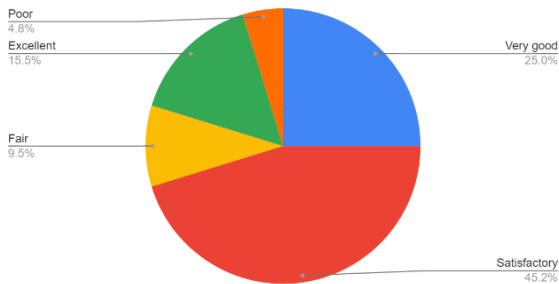
Over 70% felt that the introductory presentation was satisfactory or better, with 35% of the young people surveyed believing this presentation was very good or excellent.

How engaging did you find the presenter of the introductory speech?



Over 75% believed the presenter of the introductory speech to be satisfactory or better in engaging with the audience. Just under 50% of the young people surveyed found the presenter to be very good or excellent in engaging with the audience.

From the introduction how much of an insight did you get into the purpose and plan for the two-days?



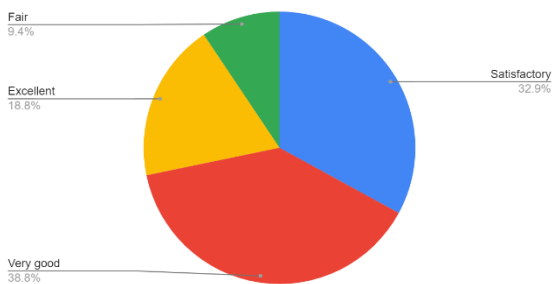
Over 85% found the introduction to be satisfactory or better. Over 40% found the introduction to be excellent or very good at effectively introducing the purpose of the event.

Although feedback is mixed there are more positive evaluations than negative. This initiative was planned, developed and implemented over a very short timescale and although it may have been more engaging if there had been live presenters and live Q&A, the time scale and the availability of a suitable platform to deliver such a requirement would have been difficult to achieve at short notice. Some young people who may have been in digital overload due to the reliance on digital learning throughout the lock downs may have found the recorded sessions less engaging. That said the overall package maintained young people's interest over the two days. It may be helpful to streamline the introduction for any future events.

Young people were then asked to consider the input from our Keynote speaker Carl Walz (Former NASA Astronaut).

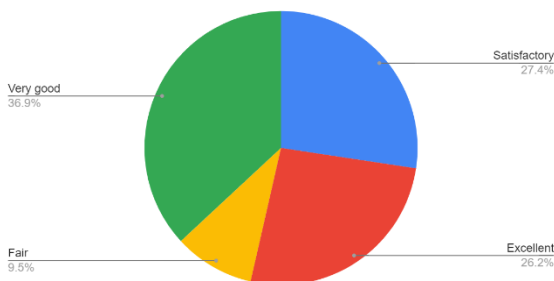
Pupil feedback on the keynote presentation from Carl Walz (Former NASA Astronaut):

How engaging did you find the presentation from Carl Walz (Ex-NASA Astronaut)?



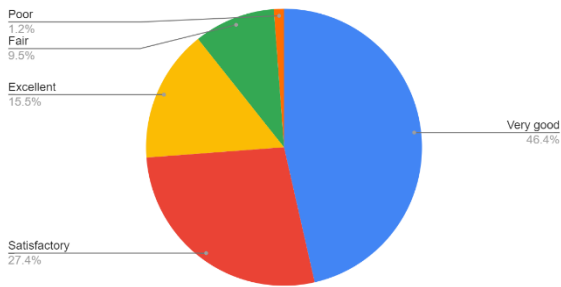
Almost 60% of young people surveyed found Carl Walz's presentation to be very good or excellent at engaging them. Over 90% of young people surveyed felt the presentation was satisfactory or better at engaging them.

How engaging did you find the presenter: Carl Walz (Ex-NASA Astronaut)?



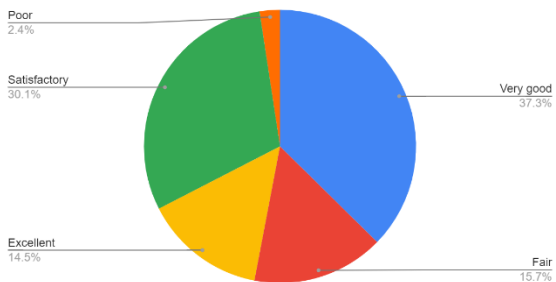
The qualities and skills of the presenter were also very well received by the young people surveyed. Over 60% found Carl a very good or excellent presenter and over 90% felt he was satisfactory or better at engaging them. No young people found his style of presentation to be poor.

How much of an insight did you get into the life of an Astronaut and the parallels to COVID19?



An important part of the presentation was linking Carl's experiences as an Astronaut and young people's experiences of COVID-19. Over 60% felt Carl was very good or excellent in the way he linked his experiences to the pandemic. Just under 90% believed Carl to be satisfactory in forging these links with the pandemic and his experiences.

How much of an understanding of the skills and character strengths needed to become an astronaut do you receive?

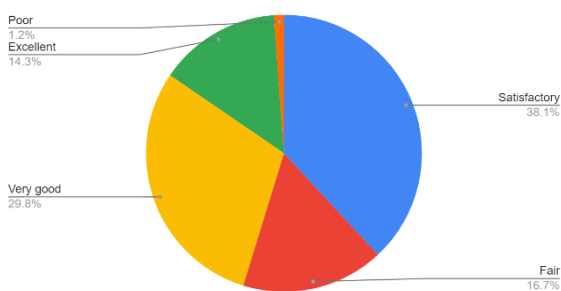


We also wanted to find out if the young people gained an understanding of the skills and character strengths needed to be an astronaut. Over 50% believed Carl was very good or excellent in giving an insight to the skills and character strengths needed to be an astronaut. Over 80% felt Carl to be satisfactory or better in detailing the skills needed to become an astronaut.

The keynote speaker also provided an example of how career pathways can take many twists and turns and helped to identify the skills that he developed during his formative years and continued to develop throughout his life. The ability to deal with setbacks and to persevere were well articulated within the presentation and provided a similar context to that of the current challenges faced by all young people throughout the pandemic.

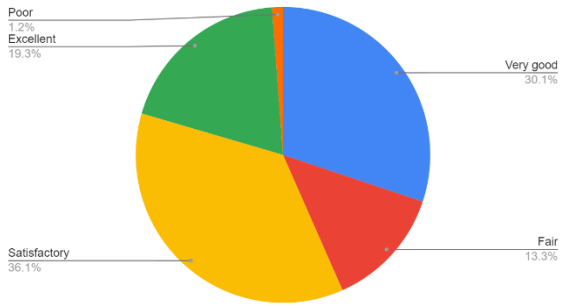
The children and young people were also asked to provide feedback on the presentation from Drew Drummond of Columba 1400 who closed the first day of the event and provided a focus on skills development. The following is the feedback from the pupil surveys:

How engaging did you find the presentation from Columba 1400?



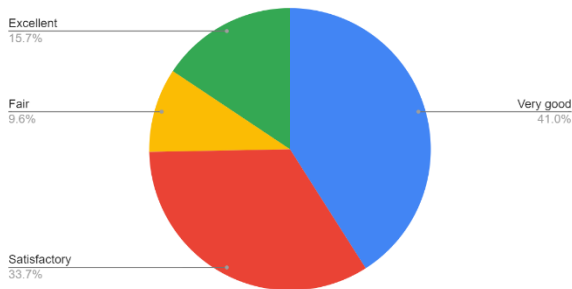
Over 40% of young people surveyed found Drew Drummond's presentation to be very good or excellent at engaging them. Over 80% of young people surveyed felt the presentation was satisfactory or better at engaging them.

How engaging did you find the presenter from Columba 1400?



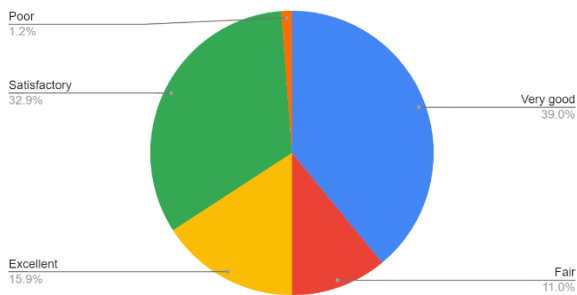
The qualities and skills of the presenter were also very well received by the young people surveyed. Around 50% found Drew Drummond a very good or excellent presenter and over 80% felt he was satisfactory or better.

How much of an insight did you get into the importance of particular key skills?



An important part of the presentation was an insight into the importance of specific key skills. Over 55% felt Drew Drummond was very good or excellent in the way he highlighted the importance of key skills. Over 90% believed Drew to be satisfactory or better in giving an insight to specific key skills.

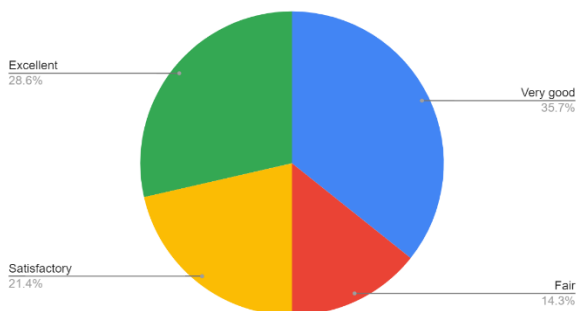
How much of an understanding did you get of the skills and character strengths of the presenter?



We also wanted to find out if the young people gained an understanding of the skills and character strengths of the presenter. Over 55% believed Drew Drummond was very good or excellent in giving an insight to his skills and character strengths. Almost 90% felt Drew to be satisfactory or better in detailing his skills.

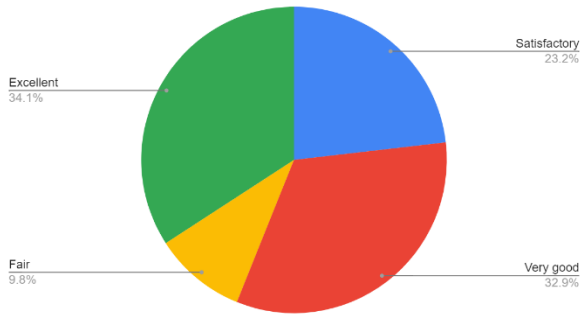
For the second day of 'Lift-Off!' we had Sarah Chew (MD Techfest) introduce the day, as well as the concept and importance of each child and young person cultivating their own 'biog' and the value this has in seeking further education and employment. Pupil feedback on Sarah Chew's presentation is below:

How engaging did you find Sarah Chew's presentation?



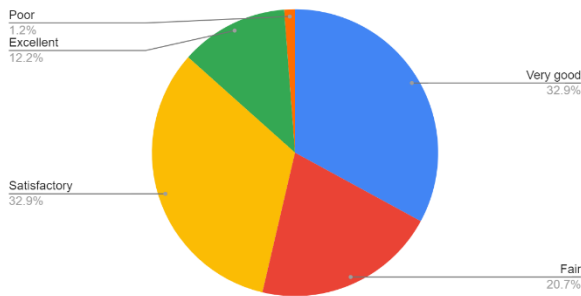
Over 60% of young people surveyed found Sarah Chew's presentation to be very good or excellent at engaging them. Over 85% of young people surveyed felt the presentation was satisfactory or better at engaging them.

How engaging did you find Sarah Chew as a presenter?



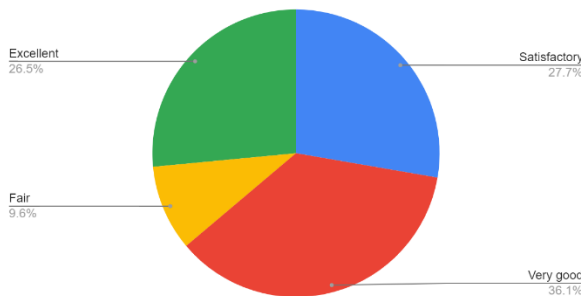
The qualities and skills of the presenter were also very well received by the young people surveyed. Over 65% found Sarah Chew a very good or excellent presenter and over 90% felt she was satisfactory or better.

How much of an insight did you get into the importance of creating your own 'biog'?



An important part of the presentation was an insight into each pupil creating a 'biog'. Over 45% felt Sarah Chew was very good or excellent in the way she highlighted the importance of pupils having a 'biog'. Almost 80% believed Sarah to be satisfactory or better in giving an insight how this biog. can be used effectively.

How much of an understanding did you get of the skills and character strengths of the presenter?



We also wanted to find out if the young people gained an understanding of the skills and character strengths of the presenter. Over 60% believed Sarah Chew was very good or excellent in giving an insight to her skills and character strengths. Over 90% felt Drew to be satisfactory or better in detailing his skills.

In addition to the four surveys detailed above we also gained feedback from the pupils on every outside partner and organisation who provided inputs for the event. This feedback from the pupils on the over 50 recordings that formed the 'Lift-Off!' event has been collated and shared individually with every partner and organisation. This has allowed both the presenters and the 'Lift Off!' team to determine what parts of presentations were well received and areas that may need to be improved for future events.

Young people were also asked for their comments at the end of the surveys on each presentation and which aspects of the event were most helpful to them. Feedback was rich and varied and suggest that young people were inspired by what they heard.

'It was good to gain a sense of the skills that are generally required to work in these industries.'

'It was helpful to hear of their struggles growing up.'

'The talks helped to motivate me and told me what to strivse for in the future.'

'Knowing the things that people did and what skills and qualities they needed to develop in order to get where they wanted to be was really helpful.'

The Keynote speaker was particularly well received.

'The talk from astronaut Carl Walz was very useful.'

'The inspirational talk from Carl Walz was excellent and I really enjoyed the computer science presentation hosted by Robert Gordons University as this targeted the type of course I would be interested in taking in the future.'

'The event gave an insight into various Universities, companies, as well as individuals presenters who shared their experience'

Young people were then asked to consider how the Event could be improved in future. There were requests for greater variety so that all young people could hear from speakers who were on a similar learning pathway.

'Have a wider variety of speakers based on the most popular subject (for me this would be music, music tech or digital technology as I would find this more influential.)'

'Get a wider range of businesses and different types of industries.'

Young people made some observations regarding the navigation of the "Lift Off" google website.

'The website could be hard to navigate at times.'

'The website was a little fiddly to navigate and certain pages were blocked off for a while...that was a bit confusing.'

'Shorter presentations and live google meets would be good.'

And two young people were keen to see improvements in how presentations were pitched.

'Say more about the things that you need and be more straightforward'

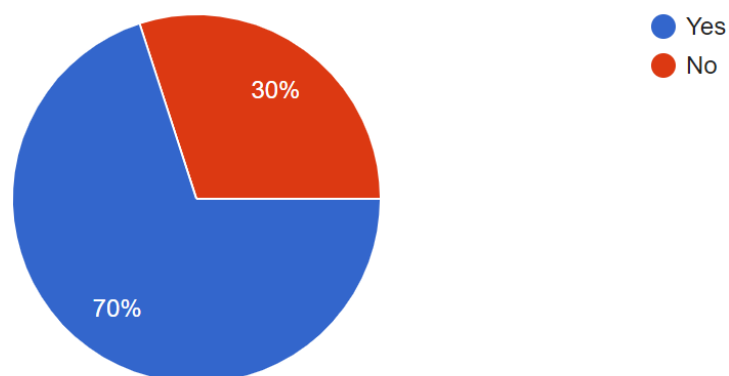
'Some presenters speaking down to us like children'



In a separate survey providers and partners were also asked to reflect on the Event and if they agreed that an event delivered by a range of employers and providers to engage Aberdeen's young people to think about their future was a good idea - 100% of providers agreed.

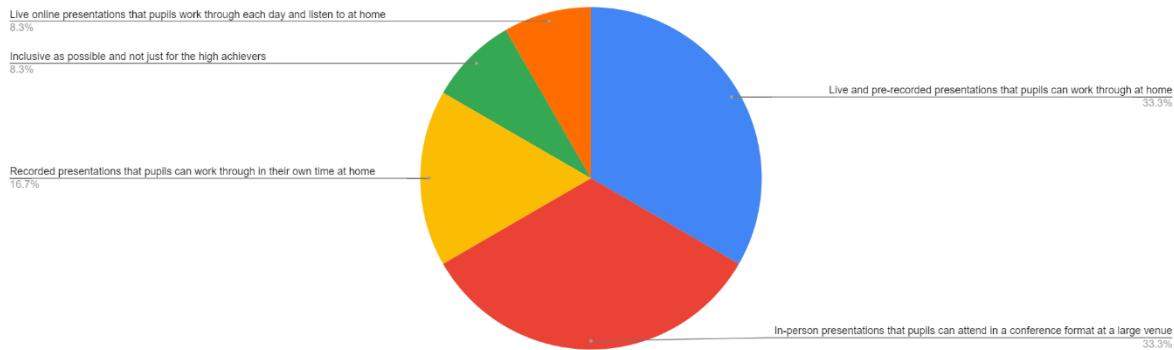
Providers and partners were then asked if they would be keen to support similar events in the future and again 100% of providers and partners positively responded.

When asked if they would be keen to be involved in the organisation and planning of a future engagement event for Aberdeen city's young people the responses were more mixed. This is understandable as not all providers would have the capacity to help organise a similar event. It is still impressive that 70% of the employers and providers who presented at 'Lift-Off!' are keen to be involved in the organisation of a future event.



Finally partners and providers were asked which of the following approaches they felt would be the best way to deliver presentations and information to our young people. From the chart below you can see that a range of suggestions have been given over how the format of a future event might work.

For a future event which of the following do you think would be the best way to deliver presentations and information?



A third of partners and providers who responded to the survey wish to see a combination of live and pre-recorded presentations that pupils work through online. Another third of respondents would prefer to see in-person events hosted at a large venue with various workshops that pupils attend throughout the day. Almost 17% of responses suggest purely recorded presentations like this year’s event. Therefore, a combination of an in-person event with live and pre-recorded online elements is the best way forward for a future event according to this survey. This will ensure that all pupils can still engage in the event even if they are not physically in attendance.

Kahoot Engagement Quiz

The ABZ Works website designers, Passion4Social, developed a participation/engagement quiz for the Induction days using Kahoot with the top performing students being asked to provide feedback on the ABZ website. We had broad coverage across the city as students participated from every academy.

Gamifying the event


Passion4Social suggested setting up a platform (Kahoot) that collects data from participants by gamifying the event. The game kept participants engaged throughout the whole event.

By creating special quiz questions for each and every presentation during the 2 days of the event, the participants were able to earn points by answering these questions.

In between the sessions and employer presentations, the young people could answer “boost” questions related to the ABZ Works website, from functionality to design.

We suggested the campaign would convert at least 5% of participants to responders (150 people).

WE CONVERTED OVER 500 PEOPLE, ALMOST 3x THE PREDICTION



Lift-Off Competition Summary

Most popular quiz- Sarah Chew
 156 players
 114 found it relevant
 110 would recommend to friends

Number of participants	540
Number of Quizzes	42
Number of participations	2723
Average of participants per Quiz	65

Summary

The purpose of the Lift off event was to provide a two-day Induction experience for all senior phase students prior to starting their new NQ courses. The two induction days were designed as an opportunity to switch the narrative to a much more positive tone and highlight the opportunities that are out there for our young people. Central officers created a google site which provided an achievable and deliverable platform for the event. The suitability and feasibility of a different platform would be part of the forward planning for any similar event in 2022.

The steering group was a collaborative effort involving Skills Development Scotland, City Growth, DYWNE, central officers and school lead staff. A similar collaboration would be the sound basis for the forward planning for any similar event in 2022.

The engagement of partner agencies and providers was excellent and very responsive when the challenge switched for contributions to be recorded digitally and in hindsight provided a higher challenge for employers and providers than they would have had if it was a live event.

Feedback would suggest that a hybrid model of both live and recorded segments would be the optimum delivery model. A longer lead time into a similar event next session would allow for more forward planning, employer/provider, and school engagement within the planning process to build on the success of this “pandemic” induced event.

The development of the ABZ Works website provides us with a platform to showcase the presentations from Lift Off 2021 and potentially offers us a platform for future events.

Note of thanks to the key-note presenters:

Richard Sweetnam, City Growth; Carl Walz, former NASA Astronaut; Sarah Chew, MD Techfest; Drew Drummond, CEO Columba 1400/Drummond International.

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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	23 September 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Platinum Jubilee Public Holiday
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/225
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 For the Chief Education Officer to seek authority to apply to the Scottish Government for an additional closure to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee subject to the decision taken at the Staff Governance Committee on 28th September.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 delegate authority to the Chief Education Officer to make a formal request to the Scottish Government for an additional closure day, subject to approval of an additional public holiday for staff at the Staff Governance Committee on 28th September.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The UK Government have announced that there will be an extended long weekend in June 2022 to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.
- 3.2 The Scottish Government acknowledges that it is for each local authority to determine which dates will be classed as public holidays.
- 3.3 On 28th September the Staff Governance Committee will consider a recommendation on the timing of the holiday.
- 3.4 Regulation 5 of the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975, as amended, requires schools to be open for a minimum of 190 days in a school year. However, Section 133 (4) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allows Scottish Ministers, on application; to modify this regulation providing they are satisfied that it would be unreasonable for Regulation 5 to apply, or to apply without modification.

- 3.5 Education authorities are therefore requested to apply for an exemption in order that schools can close for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Applications are invited as soon as reasonably practical.
- 3.6 The decision taken at the Staff Governance Committee may result in the need to apply for an exemption for an additional closure day. The granting of an exemption would allow children, young people and families to be advised of the additional closure day at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the Chief Education Officer be given delegated authority to apply for this exemption for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee if an additional public holiday is agreed by Staff Governance Committee at its meeting on 28th September.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is a legal requirement for the Authority to provide 190 days of education to school pupils in each academic session. Approval from the Scottish Government is required to vary this in any way.
- 5.2 If the Staff Governance Committee decides that all Council employees should receive an additional fixed day, there will be a requirement for the Council to make an application for an additional closure day.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	None identified		
Compliance	None identified		
Operational	There is a risk that service users will not be able to access the services they require due to the additional holiday	L	Normal public holiday service delivery levels will be applied in all essential service areas
Financial	None identified		
Reputational	None identified		
Environment / Climate	None identified		

7. OUTCOMES

7.1 The proposals in this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Full impact assessment not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

10. APPENDICES

N/A

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Tel	01225 522707

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