

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	31 August 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	Curriculum for Excellence Review 2020/2021
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an update on the independent review of the Curriculum for Excellence by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the contents of the review of the Curriculum for Excellence by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) following the review and the next steps, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) represented a significant reform to put in place a coherent 3-18 curriculum in Scotland. It places learners at the heart of education and at its centre are four fundamental capacities which reflect and recognise the lifelong nature of education and learning. More than a decade has passed since the inception of CfE.
- 3.2. The Scottish Government commissioned the OECD to conduct an independent review during 2015 that was focused on the Broad General Education (BGE) in order to inform the ongoing development of education policy, practice and leadership in Scotland.
- 3.3. In May 2019, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced the commissioning of an independent review of the Senior Phase curriculum. The intended purpose of this was to better understand how the Senior Phase curriculum was being designed and implemented in schools and to identify areas for potential development to ensure that this phase of the curriculum contributes as effectively as possible to the education of young people in Scotland.
- 3.4. Plans for a review of the Senior Phase were backed by the Scottish Parliament and key education stakeholders. In January 2020, the Scottish Parliament called for the review to be extended to cover all of CfE including the BGE, the Senior Phase and the articulation between them.
- 3.5. Adopting a broader perspective to the review of CfE, including the Senior Phase, allowed consideration of the CfE experience as a whole from a student learning perspective. It also allowed an evaluation of progress in implementing CfE at all levels in the system and an assessment of the effectiveness of the articulation between the

BGE and Senior Phase. It provided an opportunity to look to the future and consider what Curriculum for Excellence should be over the next 10 years and beyond.

4. Guiding Principles and Aims of the Review

4.1. Some key guiding principles shaped the review's focus and approach. Young people's experience and learning were the most important consideration throughout the review; the experiences of all learners, including those with additional support needs.

- ◆ The focus of the review was to understand how the policy aims are being implemented, in partnership across schools, colleges, community learning and development and employers in Scotland, for the benefit of learners

4.2. The review involved Scottish education stakeholders (in particular through Scotland's Curriculum and Assessment Board) and practitioners throughout the process. The overarching aims of the review were to:

- ◆ better understand how the curriculum is being implemented in schools, local authorities and delivery partners (looking at its design and implementation);
- ◆ identify what is working well and where progress is being made and, where possible, how progress might be strengthened and, or accelerated; and
- ◆ identify particular areas/issues that require to be focused on for development in order to ensure that the curriculum contributes as effectively as possible to the education of all young people in Scotland

5. Scope

5.1. The review's consideration of the Broad General Education (BGE) assessed progress in addressing the BGE curriculum related recommendations set out in the 2015 review.

5.2. The review's consideration of the Senior Phase curriculum considered key areas and challenges that were identified by the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Education Council and the Curriculum and Assessment Board, including subject choice and multi-level teaching. The review provided an independent perspective in order to assist in moving forward on key issues. These areas include:

- ◆ **Curriculum design** – considering how the curriculum is being designed locally and used flexibly to meet the needs of all learners. Consider how well the curriculum design principles are being used to support learning and achievement, including collaboration with colleges and other partners.
- ◆ **Local flexibility versus increased prescription** – assessing the equity of the offer for all young people through flexibility to meet local needs, as envisaged by CfE, or whether there is a case for developing a more detailed framework with scope for local flexibility. Identifying whether or not we need greater consistency in aspects of the delivery of the curriculum.
- ◆ **Depth and breadth of learning in the Senior Phase** – looking at the extent to which the changes to pedagogy (the practice of teaching) anticipated with CfE have been achieved within the Senior Phase and considering how well practitioners have been supported in understanding the aims of CfE and the impact of different approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This included the impact of qualifications on pedagogy.

- ◆ **The transition from the BGE into Senior Phase** – considering how effectively S3 is being used as a transition year in preparing young people for the Senior Phase and the articulation between the BGE and Senior Phase.
- ◆ **Vocational and academic learning and awards** – assessing the extent to which parity of esteem is being achieved in relation the different learning pathways.
- ◆ **Roles and responsibilities** – looking at how, where and when key decisions are made and the role of national agencies in providing support and guidance in relation to the curriculum.

6. Approach and Methodology

6.1. The Scottish Government invited the OECD to lead an independent review, building on the previous review led in 2015. This offered a number of benefits and advantages as the OECD:

- ◆ builds on experience with country reviews and implementation support work;
- ◆ has comparative data and targeted analysis on curriculum and its reform (Education 2030 project and Implementing Education Policies country work);
- ◆ engaged with Scotland in previous reviews: (OECD, 2007) *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*; (OECD, 2015) *Improving Schools in Scotland: an OECD Perspective*; and
- ◆ tailored its work for countries and education systems to support the development and implementation of concrete education policies through its programme *Implementing Policies: Supporting Change in Education*.

6.2. The review team drew on relevant international and Scottish data and available evidence from education stakeholders and partners that were provided to the OECD. The OECD team conducted 'virtual visits' to Scotland and carried out consultation sessions and seminars to engage with young people, practitioners and key stakeholders.

6.3. In response to the request by OECD for a project advisory group to guide the work and discuss progress and deliverables, the Scottish Government convened a Scottish Practitioner Forum.

6.4. Learner voice and participation were also a significant feature of the review. Learner perspectives were sought in collaboration with partner agencies and via appropriate methods.

7. Deliverables and Timeframes

7.1. The key deliverables from the review were:

- ◆ OECD engagement with Scottish Government and the Scottish Practitioner Forum, including strategic advice throughout the project.
- ◆ OECD led stakeholder consultation event(s) to gather input and feedback on the implementation of the CfE.
- ◆ An OECD education policy assessment report consisting of an analysis of the implementation of CfE in Scotland, providing feedback on progress to date in its implementation and offering recommendations for next steps.

- 7.2. The review ran from February 2020, concluding with a final report published by the OECD in June 2021.

[Executive summary | Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence : Into the Future | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

8. Key findings

- 8.1. The review identified a number of key findings (Appendix 1) including:

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Continued efforts are needed to enhance the coherence of the policy environment with Curriculum for Excellence.
- ◆ The approach to the ongoing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence has lacked structure and long-term perspective.
- ◆ 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
 - ◆ Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE
 - ◆ Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE
 - ◆ Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research
- ◆ Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities:
 - ◆ Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE
 - ◆ Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE
 - ◆ Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE
- ◆ Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change:
 - ◆ Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level.
 - ◆ Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence.
 - ◆ Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5*
 - ◆ Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review
- ◆ Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view:
 - ◆ Adopt a structured and long-term approach to implementation

9. Next Steps

- 9.1. The Education Secretary announced that all of the review's recommendations will be accepted in full, including recommendations on curriculum, assessment and qualifications which will see the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) replaced and Education Scotland substantially reformed.

- 9.2. The Scottish Government will actively consider what changes are required to the qualifications and assessment system. This work will be informed by the next OECD report, expected in the autumn, and by consultation with young people, parents, teachers and the wider education system.
- 9.3. Education Scotland will no longer undertake inspections, with this work becoming a separate, independent role. The Scottish Government will engage on the options for the future of inspection.
- 9.4. The OECD also suggests that the curriculum work currently undertaken by Education Scotland might best sit with any new curriculum and assessment body which will replace the SQA.
- 9.5. The Scottish Government has appointed Professor Ken Muir to lead the work on how a number of the recommendations will be implemented. Professor Muir will work with an advisory panel with a view to consulting on the design of any new agencies.
- 9.6. While this OECD report does not tackle in-depth the development of student assessment, a separate working paper from the OECD, *'Future of student assessment in Scotland's upper secondary education: A comparative perspective'* 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 and will be published in the Autumn of 2021.

10. Employee Implications

- 10.1. There are no employee implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

12. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 12.1. There are no significant implications for climate change, sustainability and the environment arising from the recommendations in this report.

13. Other Implications

- 13.1. There are no direct risks in terms of the information contained in this report.

14. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 14.1. There is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment as a result of the recommendations in this report.

Tony McDaid
Executive Director (Education Resources)

8 July 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ◆ Improve achievement, raise educational attainment and support lifelong learning

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

OECD report 2015

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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Appendix 1

OECD Report

Executive Summary

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.