

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL
LEARNING AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE

3 MAY 2023

EDUCATION REFORM IN SCOTLAND UPDATE

Report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)
(Report No. 23/128)

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Learning and Families Committee with an update on the progress of the education reform which is currently underway within the Scottish education system. It also provides some detail of how education officers, children and young people, parents and school staff are engaging with the consultations and activities which are being undertaken to provide feedback on the reform agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that committee:
- Notes the content of this report and requests that Education and Children's Services (ECS) continues to actively engage in the reform programmes and ensure that all education stakeholders and relevant partners have the opportunity to provide their views on future policy.

3. STRUCTURE OF REPORT

- 3.1 This report is structured over the following sections:
- Section 4: Background
 - Section 5: Update
 - Section 6: Further Considerations
 - Appendices

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Scottish Government commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to undertake a review of education policy as part of its drive to improve the educational outcomes for all children and young people across Scotland. The policy review '[Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective](#)' was published in 2015 and provided an independent review of the direction of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), focusing mainly on the impacts within the Broad General Education (BGE), which covers the curriculum up to S3.
- 4.2 The report provided some recommendations which would help to "move the CfE and the Scottish system to be among those leading the world."

The report set out some key recommendations eg, such as ensuring that all relevant stakeholders get the opportunity to be involved in the on-going curriculum review. The Scottish Government accepted the recommendations within the OECD report and this informed national policy drivers including the [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#).

- 4.3 In 2020, the Scottish Government invited a further review from the OECD to assess the implementation of CfE in primary and secondary schools, and to analyse the progress made since the initial report in 2015. [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future](#) was published in June 2021 and provided the following key findings:
- CfE continues to be bold, widely supported, and has the flexibility to further develop to meet the changing contexts of schools and communities.
 - Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of CfE and needs a better structure to develop shared ownership and effective leadership.
 - Continued efforts are needed to enhance the coherence of the policy environment.
 - The approach to CfE has lacked structure and long term perspective.
- 4.4 Overall, the OECD report found that schools in Scotland have been successful in implementing CfE and are willing to make changes where challenges remain. Some of the evidence, which reported successful outcomes, were the positive results in global competencies of 15-year-old Scottish students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 and the progress shown on a number of indicators within the NIF.

However, the OECD report of 2021 made some recommendations to the Scottish Government to make continued improvements through the following broad themes:

- Balance CfE to provide a coherent learning experience from aged 3 to 18.
 - Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities.
 - Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence for effective change.
 - Lead the next steps for CfE with a long term view.
- 4.5 The Scottish Government accepted all of the recommendations sitting beneath the four broad themes of the report, and the actions agreed, as a result, form the basis of the current education reform programmes under way.
- 4.6 **Current Education Reform Programmes**
- 4.6.1 In June 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills commissioned Professor Ken Muir to provide independent advice on aspects of education

reform, specifically related to designing the implementation of the recommendations for change within the OECD report. Professor Muir consulted widely with a range of stakeholders before publishing his report [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#) in March 2022.

4.6.2 An extensive programme of education reform is now underway in Scotland following the acceptance of the recommendations from the independent reports. The three areas of reform are:

- A national discussion on education.
- An independent review of qualifications and assessments.
- Creation of three new national education bodies.

4.6.3 Each of these areas of reform will be phased to ensure that consultation feedback from stakeholders on the [National Discussion Scottish Education](#) (referred to as the National Discussion) will inform the next two phases, and subsequently, the review of qualifications and assessment will then inform the creation of the three new national education bodies.

5. UPDATE

5.1 National Discussion

5.1.1 In his report, Professor Muir recommended that the Scottish Government should initiate a National Discussion on establishing a “compelling and consensual vision for the future of Scottish education”. He stated that the vision for CfE should be part of this discussion, and that consideration be given to how the education system seeks to address the purposes described in both Section 2 of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act 2000 and Article 29 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

5.1.2 Both Section 2 and Article 29 stated that children and young people have the right to education which is ‘directed the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.’

Article 29 further states that education should develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for parents, cultural identity, language and values, preparation for responsibility of life in a free society and the development of respect for the natural environment.

5.1.3 The National Discussion has been convened by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and is being led by Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris. The “Let’s Talk Scottish Education” consultation phase took place between 21 September and 5 December 2022.

It invited young people, parents and educators to give their views about what the education system should look like for the next 20 years. Events took place across Scotland, led by schools, community groups and third sector

organisations. A series of online national events also took place, and the organisers reported a good response to the consultation part of the process.

- 5.1.4 All schools within Perth and Kinross were invited to take part in the consultation and education officers contributed to the response developed by the Association of Directors of Education (ADES). Headteachers in Perth and Kinross engaged in a session to consider their response in November 2022.

5.2 National Discussion - Next Steps

- 5.2.1 Consultation and analysis of the responses received nationally is now underway. It is planned that a 'Call to Action' will be published in Spring 2023, alongside a vision for the future with short, medium and long term aims.
- 5.2.2 The National Discussion will inform the other key areas of education reform, including the review of qualifications and assessment, and the creation of the three new education bodies.

5.3 Review of Qualifications and Assessment

- 5.3.1 The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced in October 2021 the intention to reform qualifications and assessments to ensure learners achievements are fairly recognised. 'Let's Talk Qualification and Assessment' was launched and Professor Louise Hayward, Emerita Professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation at Glasgow University, was appointed to lead the [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#).
- 5.3.2 The aim of this work is to reform the qualifications and assessment system to ensure that all senior phase learners have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the breadth, depth and relevance of their learning. It has been determined that externally assessed examinations will remain part of any new system.

Professor Hayward has set up an Independent Review Group, membership of which is drawn from:

- Those for whom qualifications matter most: learners, parents and carers.
 - Those who design develop and deliver qualifications: teachers, Headteachers, examinations boards, regulators, local policy makers and communities.
 - Those who use qualifications: schools, colleges, employers and universities.
- 5.3.3 Each member from the Independent Review Group has been tasked with bringing together representatives from across their communities to form Collaborative Community Groups, with the aim of ensuring that the range of voices from diverse backgrounds are heard.

- 5.3.4 In addition, Professor Hayward planned a series of phased stakeholder engagement opportunities across the education system as part of this consultation period and schools had been invited to participate directly in this with their school communities. The Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children's Parliament had the opportunity to share their vision for the future of qualifications and assessment in Scotland. ECS contributed a response to the consultation in partnership with secondary Headteachers.
- 5.3.5 Phase One took place from August to September 2022 and focused on the development of a set of Vision and Principles.

Phase Two took place between October 2022 to January 2023 and asked more detailed questions of stakeholder groups designed to lead to a preferred Qualifications and Assessment model.

Phase Three commenced in March 2023 and took into account the findings from Phases One and Two. Phase Three sought views on a proposed approach and the practical steps that are needed for the model to be successful. Phase Three also took into account relevant findings from the National Discussion.

5.4 **Review of Qualifications and Assessment - Next Steps**

- 5.4.1 Professor Hayward has now completed Phase One and Phase 2 of the review has now provided an interim report ([Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland: interim report](#)) to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which was published on 3 March 2023.
- 5.4.2 The interim report describes the structure of the review process, and the findings from the first and second phases are detailed and analysed. It is focused on young people aged 15-18 in all educational settings. It sets out the draft Vision and Principles for a Scottish Qualification and Assessment system and identifies the broad themes coming from the feedback. Professor Hayward noted in her interim report that many of the issues raised in Phase Two of the consultation mirror the ideas reflected in the original intentions of CfE. There was broad agreement that the system should reflect the broad range of achievements of children and young people, a desire to reduce the number of examinations, and a need to ensure a wide range of approaches is used to gather evidence of achievement.
- 5.4.3 Phase Three of the consultation commenced in March 2023 and is inviting views on a possible model. Based on the evidence received in the previous phases of engagement, Professor Hayward's interim report sets out the following proposals as part of a possible new approach:
- Significant reduction in external assessment, including examinations in the senior phase.
 - More clearly defined integration of academic and vocational qualifications.

- Collation of a broader evidence base of achievements in the senior phase, which will include skills and other competencies.
- Development of an enhanced digital infrastructure.
- A senior phase leaving certificate.

5.4.4 The key areas above are some of the areas for consideration during Phase Three of this review. The final report will be submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by the end of May 2023.

5.5 **Creation of New National Education Agencies**

5.5.1 In accepting the OECD's recommendations, the Scottish Government noted the OECD's view that having the inspectorate as part of an organisation that is also responsible for supporting school leaders, curriculum design, teacher professional learning and a range of other initiatives is an "unusual configuration".

5.5.2 It was decided that the Scottish Government would:

- Move the role of inspection out of Education Scotland in a way that maximises impact and helps to balance the dual need for local flexibility of provision alongside national consistency in outcomes.
- Consider replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with a new, specialist agency responsible for both curriculum and assessment to ensure alignment in these functions.
- Create a new national agency for Scottish education.

5.5.3 It is recognised that this will be a multi-phase programme of reform, with the new national bodies going live from 2024. This work will be informed by the two previous reviews, and will go through formal processes of design, delivery and transition activity before the establishment of the new national bodies and the policy and legislative changes are completed. Throughout the reform process, both SQA and Education Scotland will continue to deliver support for children and young people, teachers and professionals.

5.6 **Governance Arrangements and Aims for the New National Bodies**

5.6.1 A strategic board and three delivery boards have been established to oversee this work. The Education Reform Board is accountable for the delivery of all of the elements of the programme. The three other boards are:

- Inspectorate and Agency Delivery Boards (boards meeting together).
- Qualifications Body Delivery Board.
- Policy and Legislation Delivery Board.

5.7 Aims for the New Inspection Body

- 5.7.1 Professor Ken Muir recommended that the new Inspection body should be established with its independent role enshrined in legislation. Its role should be to support improvement, evaluate major changes in the education system and report annually and over longer periods on the performance of Scottish education. Crucially, it is also recommended that the new independent inspectorate should re-engage, as a matter of urgency, with the Care Inspectorate to agree a shared inspection framework to reduce the burden on early learning and childcare settings.

5.8 Aims for the National Agency for Scottish Education

- 5.8.1 The new national agency for Scottish Education will become an executive agency of the Scottish Government which will encompass the current support and improvement functions of Education Scotland, SQA's Accreditation/Regulation Directorate, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and some elements of the Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Division.
- 5.8.2 It has been agreed that the new agency should take responsibility for the SQA's current accrediting and regulatory functions, to ensure that robust safeguards are put in place that this important function remains at arm's length from Scottish Ministers, and that the integrity of the regulatory role is secure.
- 5.8.3 The main focus of the new agency is to advise the Scottish Government on curriculum and assessment policy, and to provide responsive, bespoke support and professional learning at regional and local levels. The Community Learning and Development (CLD) Standards Council will also remain part of the agency's responsibility.
- 5.8.4 In terms of governance, the new national agency will be expected to adopt a participative approach, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. It will gather views from national bodies, existing think tanks, research and practice, when developing and enhancing key policies. It is recommended that the new agency should create and sustain a forum for ongoing and proactive discussion about curriculum, assessment, learning and teaching, professional learning and leadership in Scotland.

5.9 Aims for the Qualifications and Assessment Body

- 5.9.1 It has been accepted that a new body, Qualifications Scotland, should be established. It is required to take on board SQA's current awarding functions, specifically the responsibility for the design and delivery of qualifications, the operation and certification of examinations and the awarding of certificates. It should also continue to provide the services currently contracted by organisations, governments and businesses, and including SQA's current international work. The governance structure of the new qualifications body will be revised to include more representation from learners, teachers, practitioners and stakeholders.

5.10 Role of the Policy and Legislative Delivery Board

5.10.1 Professor Ken Muir's report was clear in advice to the Scottish Government that national bodies should collaborate more effectively to ensure that policies align well with each other and with the renewed vision for Scottish Education. Arrangements require to be put in place to ensure the active monitoring of the volume of policy expectations on local authorities, schools and senior leaders so that they are realistic, manageable and well understood.

5.10.2 A clear transition programme is to be put in place to oversee the changes and reforms which are being carried out. Staff affected by these reforms must be kept effectively engaged and informed of progress across the reform agenda.

6. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Scottish Education is undergoing major changes across all of its functions at a national level, and these will impact on the vision, design, delivery and quality assurance of the education of children and young people for the future. Each of the reform programmes will be phased and inform each other, and will have short, medium and long term goals. Systems and processes are being built in to ensure as wide an engagement as possible with all stakeholders, and particularly with children, young people, parents and carers, and education professionals who will be most impacted by these reforms.

6.2 The education Service management team, senior leaders and school communities in Perth and Kinross are actively engaging with this reform programme whilst continuing to deliver the current national priorities for education in Scotland, excellence and equity for all. The Service is well placed to undertake a change programme in line with the reforms required.

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes/None
Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement	None
Corporate Plan	none
Resource Implications	
Financial	none
Workforce	none
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	none
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	N/A
Strategic Environmental Assessment	
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	
Legal and Governance	
Risk	
Consultation	
Internal	yes
External	yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life.
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No. (ii).

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Objectives:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life.
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No. (ii).

- 1.3 The report also links to the Education & Children's Services Vision, Values and Priorities in respect of the following key Priority area:

- Learning and Achievement

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 There are no financial implications for Perth and Kinross Council in this report.

Workforce

- 2.2 There are no workforce implications in this report.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 N/A

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.

The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.
- 3.2.1 The proposals have been considered under the Act; however, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report. This is because the Committee are requested to note the contents of the report only and the Committee are not being requested to approve, adopt, or agree to an action or to set the framework for future decisions.

Sustainability

- 3.3 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Under the Climate Change

(Scotland) Act 2009 the Council also has a duty relating to climate change and, in exercising its functions must act:

- In the way best calculated to delivery of the Act's emissions reduction targets.
- In the way best calculated to deliver any statutory adaption programmes.
- In a way that it considers most sustainable.

3.3.1 N/A

Legal and Governance

3.4 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.5 N/A

Risk

3.6 N/A

4. Consultation

Internal

4.1 The reform agenda for education, the details of which are contained within this report, are the subject of ongoing consultation by the national agencies and consultants who are discharged with carrying them out. Consultees within ECS include education officers, school leaders, parents and carers and young people. The Head of Legal and Governance Services has also been consulted on the contents of this report.

External

4.2 Extensive consultation is taking place across all local authority areas with all stakeholders within education on all of the reform areas contained within this report. The results of these consultations have yet to be published.

5. Communication

5.1 A communication plan will be developed as each of the consultation findings, and subsequent reforms are decided upon at national level.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

2.1 The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report:

- [Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective](#)
- [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future](#)

- [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#)
- [National improvement framework and improvement plan](#)
- [Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000](#)
- [Children's rights - Human rights](#)
- [Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\) 2018](#)
- [Putting learners at the centre: towards a future vision for Scottish education](#)
- [National Discussion Scottish Education](#)
- [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#)
- [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland: interim report](#)

3. APPENDICES

3.1 There are no appendices to this report.