



National Discussion on Education

The Open University in Scotland
consultation submission

05.12.2022

What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?

- One where young people are critically engaged with their world and their learning. We would argue this is a 'hidden' component of the current Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) capacities and therefore can lead to an under-estimation of children's (including young children's) abilities to be critically reflective.
- One which embraces key learning as sustainability principles such as uncertainty, incompleteness, material engagements, partnership and collaborations, envisioning differently and critical reflection.
- One in which there is a coherent understanding of what we mean by knowledges and what is valued – which may be multiple and varied depending on contexts – where knowledges aren't limited to what is abstracted, tangible, stateable and therefore assessable, but recognises the different forms of knowledge gained from engaging in physical, affective, and playful experiences and critically reflecting on them. This then allows for the continued challenging of hierarchies between 'practical' and 'academic' knowledges and continue to promote the idea that all subjects have practical, real-world experiences through which knowledges are developed. It also allows for a coherence between the underpinning vision of CFE and assessment frameworks that value this diversity of knowledges. This is particularly important in relation to the next point.
- Where young people (right from early years) are prepared for modern professional settings through pedagogies of learning as sustainability, interdisciplinarity, flexibility, material and digital engagements, making critical learning from experiences etc.
- One where young people are well equipped for further study or working life and well informed about educational opportunities available to them.
- An educational system that offers seamless transitions between stages and providers.
- One where assessments are 'enabling gateways' rather than end points or hurdles. This would involve a higher focus on 'capturing' ongoing learning and achievement.
- Where digital learning isn't a *mode* of delivery, but a pedagogical imperative for new and innovative learning.

- Breadth and depth of curriculum – The Open University [Young Applicants in Schools Scheme](#) (YASS) supports this delivering across all 32 Scottish local authority areas. Supporting students making the transition from school to university. Pupils are offered a range of open modules to choose from in subjects such as accounting, economics, engineering and law. They were able to study at home during the periods of remote learning which provided an important contribution to the school curriculum during this challenging time.
- A whole system approach to education and training, where the full range of pathways and qualifications are utilised and widely recognised and understood (e.g., College to University articulation)
- One which is supported by highly skilled, highly valued practitioners (including classroom assistants) who are empowered to critique and make educational experiences differently as part of ongoing cycles of *supported* professional inquiry.

How do we make that a reality?

- Support from the **Open University** – Articulation through our [Colleges Routes](#), YASS, professional learning opportunities for practitioners, microcredentials, respected online supported distance learning offer.
- We continue to partner with all 16 regional colleges in Scotland, outside of UHI network, to provide college students with progression routes to flexible degree level study. With Ayrshire, City of Glasgow, and Fife Colleges we have collaborated on campus-based delivery providing students with the opportunity to transition to an OU degree within the familiar environment of their local college. Dundee and Angus College have successfully integrated OU Access modules into their wider access programme, OU Options, at the college.
- A greater understanding of **which organisations are influencing** and bringing their perspectives to which tables – e.g., govt working groups, influential boards, organisation committees and which are currently not. A key driver for change from Muir and the OECD was to expand the diversity of voices and opinions influencing the education sector, and we feel strongly that the Open University can contribute to that given our 4 nations (and international) perspective, our unique positioning across the whole of Scotland and our experiences in digital and online professional learning across the sector. 1
- **Data driven** approach to planning for changing demographics.
- We welcome the most recent professional standards and their emphasis on **practitioner inquiry** as a generative, positive, innovative part of both being a professional *and* in creating a more dynamic sector, however, we feel this is often misunderstood and unsupported in busy professional contexts. More exploration of *why* inquiry is important, *how* it can be achieved (inc. challenging key misconceptions), *who* can support it, and *how* it can create wider system changes is necessary.
- Create spaces to discuss **‘What we mean by knowing’** within a refreshed CFE debate, recognising the significant diversity of voices that can contribute to this (esp. early years, practical subjects, as well as those that are working within HE research in this area, of which there is plenty in Scotland institutions).
- More **collaborative spaces and ways of working** between practitioners and HEI’s to create an ‘inquiry culture’. An Appreciative Approach to Inquiry could be a catalyst for this work – OpenLearn course being developed currently –

where inquiry starts and builds from what has generative potential within a system already, rather than always starting from a perceived problem or issue.

- Embed **anti-racist principles of assessments**, not purely from an anti-racist perspective but also recognising their pedagogical power in shifting the tone of what assessments are for, what the power relationships are within them, what they are trying to 'do', and creating space for diversity of expression.
- Create clearer **pathways for practitioner professional learning**, recognising the tensions between required learning / learning needs for current roles/pedagogical approaches and aspirational learning for future roles/pedagogical approaches. It is this final form of PL which arguably is less visible, less accessible and yet more likely to lead to significant personal and organisational change where it brings in ideas, materials, ways of working and challenges assumptions about the current (see OU PL report for initial emerging findings around these issues).
- A greater recognition of the role **of informal modes of professional learning** that support ongoing practitioner reflection and development.
- **Greater transparency around funding for professional learning** – where practitioners across all phases are clear about funding options to support their own ambitions beyond mandated training.

How can every child and young person's individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?

- Anti-racist assessment approaches
- Greater emphasis on **ongoing practitioner inquiry** around whole groups, small groups and individual needs within their context.
- **Revisit what we mean by knowledge** – as mentioned in Q1/2 – ensuring knowing through experiencing and engaging in creating knowledge is valued by the system, and coherently assessed.
- Ensuring **Professional Learning (PL) opportunities** to support and address Children's and Young People's needs are accessible, rooted in practice and address broader assumptions about what progress, achievement, learning can look / feel / sound like. **EDI** was identified as a significant area for PL need in the Open University Professional Learning survey 2022.

What is one thing that needs to stay and why?

- **Strong working relationship between OU and national bodies, LAs and education settings** – recognition of unique offer from the Open University for Higher Education (inc. degree routes for practitioners with ‘non-traditional’ qualifications in order to access teacher education or similar) and but also for Knowledge Exchange, Professional Learning across the education sector, and partnership working to find custom solutions to gaps in provision.
- **Many of the underpinning principles of CFE** – interdisciplinarity, sustainability, digital innovation – which are all highly important to the system moving forward and the success of our young people.

What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?

- **Reigniting the role of postgraduate study and practice-based learning for teachers and practitioners** as a highly valued process of individual and system transformation and self-renewal. The Open University Postgraduate offer can support Scotland’s ambitions for a teaching workforce that is critically engaged with new learning, emerging pedagogies, and current debates in education both within Scotland and beyond that can transform practices.
- One that **looks outward beyond traditional school sector** for opportunities from further and Higher Education providers.
- One that **embracing differences** (of practice, engagement, routes, opinions) as part of a self-improving system. We see a role for an **Appreciative approach to inquiry** (both as driven by individual practitioners about their own pedagogies, but also in shaping how and what leadership of diverse practices looks like, and whole system embracing of innovative emerging practices) as underpinning this embracing of diversity.
- **Meaningful partnerships** We would like to see an increased role of organisations and RICs to act as ‘brokers’ of initial relationships and discussions, where the system as a whole acts to deliberately create spaces for a diversity of partnerships to emerge and be supported.
- Equipping young people with skills/knowledge **to transition successfully** between different stages of their educational journey i.e., school to university, college to work or further study.
- Recognition of full range of achievement at school beyond SQA qualifications.

How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?

As an organisation which has a very large and active presence in the Scottish education sector (with over 20,000 students, over 400 Associate Lecturers and with relationships with over 150 schools through our YASS scheme) we think it can be tricky to establish spaces where we should / could be contributing to discussions and sharing our knowledge. We would propose that part of ensuring everyone has a say involves **asking organisations where they feel their expertise lies and acting as a broker** for establishing a diverse range of contributing voices in the most appropriate spaces. For us this would be around supporting classroom assistants practice and the professional learning of practitioners across the sector (EYS–FE).

How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e., physical and mental wellbeing)

Covid has highlighted even more the need for educational practices as a form of nurture. This was highlighted in our recent OU professional learning survey. As a system we must **build on what has been learned during the pandemic** and develop further the skills, systems and support that we created as an emergency response but can now inform how the sector continues to care and support young people. Key to this is **an explicit recognition of this role in the curriculum** – which is there in GIRFEC – but can feel at tension with other drivers.

How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?

- **Whole system approach**, utilising capacity and expertise outwith the traditional school sector to provide learning opportunities and transition support to pupils during their time at school
- **Recognition of wider achievement and qualifications** at school for progression to traditional universities, i.e., full recognition of access/bridging/additional study opportunities taken up by pupils in addition to SQA qualifications.
- **Changes to assessments** to 'capture' learning in motion, rather than only assess outcomes, ensuring that anti-racist principles lead to opportunities

for personalisation, creative response and diversity of approaches which can support pupils to be agents of their own learning.

How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?

- Embedding of **learning as sustainability** (which requires some practitioners to change their relationships with 'how they are' with pupils, content, contexts) to enable young people to **critically engage with their world and their learning**, embraces key **learning as sustainability principles** such as uncertainty, incompleteness, material engagements, partnership and collaborations, envisioning differently and critical reflection.
- Inclusion in events such as the [MOCK COP](#) organised by the Open University, Highland One World and Developing the Young Workforce: Inverness and Central Highlands, where young people learn about key world events relating to climate change and how they can make positive change and have an impact in their own communities and the wider world.
- Continue to challenge the 'boundaries' of classroom walls / disciplines by promoting and supporting **outdoor learning, exploratory play, material engagement**, across all of the curriculum and across all phases. For example, there is increasing interest in material play within adult education and professional learning, and the Scottish system provides excellent materials and support for play in Early Years and lower primary, but there is a 'gap' in the middle where these principles – which comes back to views and knowledge – are missing from pedagogical debates.

Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?

- Working across the nations and internationally, we at the OU value and recognise the principles that underpin the CFE and the associated values around professionalism (including support for professional learning). However, we do feel that there is a significant gap in **recognising and supporting classroom assistance to develop their practices**, an area that we have particular expertise.
- Through our recent professional learning survey ([Open University Professional Learning report 2022](#)), we identified the significant contribution that moving to more online PL has made to the accessibility and variety of professional learning available across the sector. This does come with

tension, where PL as a site for **wellbeing and personal connectivity** is felt to be lessened which we feel needs addressing, but we also feel strongly that the benefits of **online PL can make it an important and generative space for change**. However, there are some barriers to maximising this opportunity including the **digital upskilling of practitioners, equipment and barriers to connectivity and ensuring opportunities are clearly and widely publicised**.

- We would welcome a **data driven approach to the allocation of funding** for flexible lifelong learning, cognisant of both learner demand and the needs of the economy and industry.
- The Scottish education system benefits from a wide range of established pathways and qualifications, however **a more joined up approach to learner journeys** and associated funding would be beneficial.

