

**Submission by
The Open University in Scotland**

Independent Education Reform Review

November 2021

Education Reform

Consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to The Scottish Government

Respondent Information Form

Please Note this form **must** be completed and returned with your response. To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our privacy policy: <https://www.gov.scot/privacy/>

Are you responding as an individual, group or an organisation?

- Individual
 Group
 Organisation

If responding as an individual or group, which of the following best describes your role in the education system?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Carer | <input type="checkbox"/> Child / Young Person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher / Lecturer / Practitioner | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School / Centre Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> National Agency Officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority / Regional Officer | <input type="checkbox"/> Employer / Industry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please state: | |

If responding as an individual or group, which of the following best describes your sector?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early years | <input type="checkbox"/> Primary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tertiary (Further / Higher Education) |

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response.

Please indicate your publishing preference:

- Publish response with name
- Publish response only (without name)
- Do not publish response

Information for organisations:

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' is available for individual respondents only. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, in the analysis report.

We may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

- Yes
- No

Consultation Questions

SECTION 1 – VISION

As an introduction to the questions which follow in this consultation, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

1.1 The vision for Curriculum for Excellence reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland.

- Strongly Agree**
- Agree**
- Neither Agree/Disagree**
- Disagree**
- Strongly Disagree**

1.2 What do you think should be retained and/or changed?

There is an opportunity if the capacities are refreshed to emphasize the importance of developing criticality in our young people. Not only through critical thinking and critical reflection, but through critical making (see Ratto 2008) in practical, hands-on learning throughout the curriculum (not only through the Arts/STEAM but in every area of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)).

Such criticality is increasingly essential to actively participating in society (whether in politics, public health, digital or sustainable living). While there are areas of the current CfE which have a strong emphasis on criticality, arguably, it should permeate every aspect of learning more thoroughly. This would strengthen the Interdisciplinary learning agenda (IDL) agenda as well as underpinning the other capacities and provide a 'thread' through which curriculum and assessment could build (see note later about coherence from capacities, through curriculum and assessment).

The aspect that is crucial to the curriculum is its holistic approach to education of children and young people and should definitely be retained in future iterations.

SECTION 2 - CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

2.1 Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions.

- Strongly Agree*
 Agree
 Neither Agree/Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

2.2 Please share what you believe currently contributes to a coherent progression.

The fact that learners work with the same curriculum across the different stages of their study provides that coherence. For students leaving school and moving to the further education sector having the same broad concepts, outcomes and experiences supports this progression to a different model of learning. However, we are concerned at the ways in which *curriculum as lived* doesn't always live up to the CfE vision, whereby accountability procedures, societal and political views of 'what counts' and exam requirements can provide a stronger driver for practice than the CfE philosophy. This tension is something which we hope will be addressed.

2.3 Please share ideas you may have to improve learner progression across stages and sectors.

- Closer links between stages and between school and further education and higher education sectors are important.
- Building on and recognising previous learning.
- A clearer articulation of the vision/philosophy of CfE as enacted in assessment practices.

3.1 In practice, learning communities are empowered and use the autonomy provided by Curriculum for Excellence to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners.

- Strongly Agree*
 Agree
 Neither Agree/Disagree
 Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3.2 Please share ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance this in future.

Supporting and recognising teachers' agency as curriculum makers (with their pupils) is important. Collaborative, responsive, iterative curriculum development should become more of a focus for professional learning, sharing practices within and across schools and stages.

4.1 The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency will help to address the misalignment of curriculum and assessment as outlined in the OECD report¹.

- Strongly Agree*
 Agree
 Neither Agree/Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

4.2 Please share your views of the potential advantages of establishing such an Agency.

The agency can build on the learning from Scotland's and the international experience in curriculum development and assessment. The fact that Scotland has a common curriculum that goes beyond school education is an important asset to build on to support learners' progression and outcomes.

4.3 Please share your views of the potential disadvantages of establishing such an Agency.

The agency needs to have the powers to make changes based on clearly researched and proven evidence. This is a long process so not allowing sufficient time to understand the changes needed, identify the best solutions and allow time for implementation before evaluating impact could be one of the key disadvantages of such an agency. Ultimately the authority of such an agency will rest not only on its communications and outputs, but on the way, it mitigates for unexpected outcomes of its own actions on pedagogies and curricula decision making.

¹ [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future | en | OECD](#)

5.1 The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications² play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

5.2 Please identify the main factors, if any, that support a broader range of SQA qualifications being included in the curriculum in secondary schools.

We are aware of several initiatives across the country where SQA HNC qualifications are being offered as SCQF level 7 options in schools, often as an alternative to advanced higher. This would seem to be a positive development and if rolled out nationally would provide clear opportunities for students to articulate to University at Year 2 on completion of HNC and progress through SCQF levels seamlessly.

5.3 Please share any ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance the role of a broader variety of qualifications in the curriculum in secondary schools.

The Young Applicants in Schools Scheme offered by the Open University in Scotland is an example of a broader range of courses being available and beneficial. YASS is a national bridging programme for S6 pupils and offers them the opportunity to take a year 1 (SCQF Level 7) university module while at School. Pupils report that the addition of YASS to the curriculum supports the development of skills essential for success at University, including independent learning and time managing skills, and allows them to explore subjects in more detail before progressing to University or college.

National initiatives such as YASS, delivered efficiently and digitally, compliment the core curriculum offer in schools and increase depth and breadth of choice for pupils. Our experience shows that this additionality is particularly important for pupils and schools in remote and rural locations, where take up of the YASS offer has historically been strong.

Closer relationship with colleges and universities may also allow for further integration of FE and HE study opportunities into the secondary school curriculum.

Working collaboratively with schools to increase parental understanding of a broader range of qualifications being offered in schools would also be key to the success of any further development in this area, as sectoral experience of embedding qualifications such as foundation apprenticeships and HN qualifications has demonstrated.

² [Explore our qualifications - SQA](#)

6.1 Technologies are fully and appropriately utilised as a support for curriculum and assessments.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

6.2 Please share any comments you may have on the use of technologies to support curriculum and assessments, and what could be done to deliver improvements.

7. Please share any additional comments you have on curriculum and assessment.

SECTION 3 - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

8.1 There is clarity on where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

8.2 Please indicate where you think the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence should lie.

9.1 There is clarity on the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs for support with curriculum and assessment issues.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

9.2 Please share which aspects of the support currently provided by national agencies and other providers is working well.

The Professional Learning Network has been a useful space, bringing together stakeholders across local, regional, nation levels to discuss key issues. While the agenda is often framed around innovations or sharing specific practices, some of the most useful discussions have been sharing 'on the ground' experiences, resulting in others in the system know what is happening for different people in the network and making connections as a result. This type of 'cross-system' networking space should be maintained and extended.

9.3 Please indicate where you think greater clarity is needed in relation to the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs / requests for support with curriculum and assessment issues.

10.1 There is clarity on where high quality support for leadership and professional learning can be accessed to support practitioners.

- Strongly Agree*
 Agree
 Neither Agree/Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

10.2 Please share any comments you may have on support for leadership and professional learning.

There is such a broad range of professional learning opportunities some of which are offered by Education Scotland, some through endorsed partners, some through Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), local authorities, schools etc. Some is accredited, some is not. It can be difficult to navigate, even if it is understood how to access the different opportunities.

The OECD 2021 report 'Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future' highlighted the need for the system (including teachers) to look for challenge, and tools to critique, in order to ensure the system doesn't become stagnant or complacent. A key question for accessing professional learning, is how we ensure everyone, across the whole system, is accessing new, challenging, critiquing ideas that are *generative* of practices, conversations and ideas that keep the curriculum dynamic and responsive.

Where practitioners rely on professional learning opportunities 'handed to them' from their own context, the voices and ideas that they are hearing will inevitably be limited. How do we create frameworks to help practitioners easily access voices and ideas *beyond* their locality? Covid-19 has provided a huge opportunity here, in developing more online professional learning and networking opportunities. These should be a springboard for bringing in more challenging conversations across all phases/geographic areas etc.

The Open University offers an array of resources and courses to support [professional learning](#). We have a range of materials on topics such as mental health, inclusion and child development available for free on our [OpenLearn](#) platform to support practitioner enquiry.

11.1 There is sufficient trust with all stakeholders, including children, young people, parents & carers, so they are genuinely involved in decision making.

- Strongly Agree*
 Agree
 Neither Agree/Disagree
 Disagree

Strongly Disagree

11.2 Please share any ideas you may have on how trust and decision making can be further improved.

12.1 Independent inspection has an important role to play in scrutiny and evaluation, enhancing improvement and building capacity.

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

12.2 Please give examples of how you would like to see scrutiny and evaluation being carried out in future.

13. Please share any additional comments on roles and responsibilities in Scotland's education system.

SECTION 4 - REPLACING THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY AND REFORMING EDUCATION SCOTLAND

Removing Scrutiny (Inspection and review) from Education Scotland

14. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example what form should this agency take)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example the development of a new national approach to inspection including alignment with other scrutiny functions)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example whether the independence of the inspectorate could be jeopardised by change)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

Further Reform of Education Scotland

15. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on how the functions currently housed in Education Scotland could be reformed.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example which functions should continue to sit within a reformed Education Scotland, and are there any functions which could be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities reform could present (for example should more prominence be given to aspects of Education Scotland's role)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example disruption of service to education establishments and settings)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

There is much to be celebrated and maintained about Education Scotland's work, particularly around professional learning and associated evaluative and initiative work.

The collaboration with Education Scotland on our work in indigenous languages, specifically the Scots language, has been particularly impactful. The Open University (OU) has an agreement with Education Scotland that their only Scots Language coordinator dedicates time regularly to our collaboration. It has not only resulted in a new network for OU Languages in this area, but we have created two new courses.

The first one is the free [Scots Language and Culture course](#) on OpenLearn Create, which was nominated for the Scots Language awards in 2020. Through our collaboration with Education Scotland, we were able to recruit 15 prominent figures as course authors and produce all audio resources using Education Scotland technology. Being featured regularly in the media and the only substantive online offering of its kind, the course has attracted over 30,000 students nationally and internationally. The Scots Language Centre uses this course for working with new audiences and recommends it on a regular basis to people they work with globally, for example on 28/1/21, when the Scots Language Centre director commended the course at the UNESCO & Scottish Government Arctic Connections event.

The second development is our Scots language teacher continuing professional development (CPD) course developed in collaboration with Education Scotland. This is the first substantive teacher CPD course in Scots language, which carries a GTCS professional recognition element. The course has already received much praise, for example through its mention as a best practice example of supporting the minority languages in the European Council's [fifth evaluation report](#) on the implementation of its recommendations in the different parts of the UK.

Through the collaboration with Education Scotland, we have built a successful network with schools, many in low SIMD areas across Scotland, where we develop

new approaches of supporting and enabling teacher CPD in the field of Scots language. This work enables us to tackle issues of inequality in education and equip teachers with the skills required to teach and include pupils speaking Scots as their native language in multilingual classrooms across Scotland. Training in multilingual education settings will also benefit teachers who work with migrant communities.

Reform could present a real opportunity to clarify and strengthen professional learning throughout the system, through ongoing supported inquiry (as per the new General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) requirements). Reform, and the decoupling of this role from inspection, creates opportunity to think carefully about how such Inquiry can be best supported (mentoring / online communities / in partnerships with other institutions / through individual schools, local authorities etc).

Creating 'pathways' around different 'themes' could offer practitioners a scaffold as to how they can piece together different professional learning offers to create a coherent and exciting package. Such packages could then be used more effectively towards accredited learning, where they might better form the basis of practitioner inquiry through bringing together different perspectives and critiques.

Replacing SQA

16. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example could a function be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example should more prominence be given to an aspect of SQA's role)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example loss of income, confusion as to system of awards in Scotland)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

The replacement body should retain a strong centralised approach to the development of HN qualifications. The Open University, being active across the 4 UK nations, sees significant benefit to the approach taken to the development and management of HN qualifications in Scotland, the common standards and structure of these qualifications, and national delivery arrangements in Scotland's colleges. This uniform approach is key for facilitating articulation to university.

The replacement body responsible for HN qualifications should continue to be cognisant of the needs of all HN students, including those using qualifications to articulate to university. Recognising the role articulation plays in widening access and facilitating student mobility, the replacement body should seek to work more closely with the university sector, as it takes forward the NextGen: HN Project, to fully explore issues around articulation for all learners and facilitate more diverse and supportive learner journeys.

Considering the Establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment Agency

17. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.

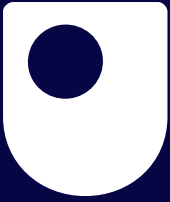
We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example are there alternative models for this reform?)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example what should the role of the new agency be?)
- c) the risks associated with any reform
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

The creation of such an agency has the *potential* to ensure progressive, creative, innovative ways of working, but this will rest significantly on excavating the underpinning beliefs, assumptions, and ways of working of those employed in the new agency and their relationship with education stakeholders in Scotland. Knowing the complex nature of the terms 'curriculum' and 'assessment', as well as the unique ways they are enacted in different disciplines (and in IDL). phases and contexts (both in Scotland and beyond), will need to be at the centre of a shared understanding of a new agency.

There is a challenge that these more complex views of curriculum and assessment aren't fully understood by broader stakeholders. Articulating the *coherence* between capacities, curriculum (both written and lived) and nature of assessments will be essential in helping explain decisions and ensure that pedagogical practices 'lead' assessment design rather than 'follow'. Models such as the International Baccalaureate assessments and some H.E assessment practices, provide significantly different views of what assessment *can* look, sound and feel like. For this new combined agency there is an opportunity to re-see the role of ongoing teacher (or co-created teacher/pupil) assessment as an integrated curriculum activity (i.e. not separated out into curriculum and assessment but curriculum experiences as ongoing assessment) (see https://ou-iet.cdn.prismic.io/ou-iet/4e498b2d-4ed4-4991-ae20-e1e0f5975cfd_innovating-pedagogy-2021.pdf).

If you have any additional comments and suggestions relating to this consultation, please send them to EducationReform@gov.scot



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SCOTLAND