SPICe Briefing
Pàipear-ullachaidh SPICe

School education: subject profile

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This briefing provides an overview of Scottish education. It identifies some key policies and policy challenges for the coming parliamentary session. It also identifies the main agencies and organisations involved.

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Introduction

The school education policy landscape is complex with roles and responsibilities distributed at national, regional, local authority, school and individual levels.

The performance of the education system has been the subject of political debate and scrutiny. The OECD's review of the Curriculum for Excellence was published in June 2021. Along with the response to the pandemic, that review is likely to set the policy agenda in school education in the coming years.

This short briefing is intended to set out, in broad terms, the policy approaches to school education and the key policy actors and structures.

Policy approach

School education is one of the biggest devolved policy areas, both in terms of expenditure and political profile. The delivery of school education is the responsibility of local authorities, which in this role are known as education authorities.

The Scottish Government is responsible for the overall education system and the strategic approach. While the Scottish Government is able to make regulations directing local authorities, and the Parliament to legislate, in practice policy tends to develop on a non-statutory footing.

A key feature of the policy landscape is committees (or councils, or steering groups etc.). These tend to be convened by the Government and the remits range from the overall policy approach (the Scottish Education Council) to more specific policy areas. These groups can develop policy and also plan the delivery of policy. Membership of these groups can vary depending on the subject but will typically include the major stakeholders outlined in this briefing.

Another policy lever the Scottish Government has is bilateral agreements with COSLA. Often this will entail a commitment from local government to implement a policy and the Scottish Government agreeing to additional funding for this purpose. An example of this approach is universal free school meals in the first three years in primary school, which is being extended further in the coming years.

National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan

The Scottish Government has bold ambitions in school education. Its vision is set out in the National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan (NIF).

> " **Our vision for education in Scotland** Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors; Achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap."

Scottish Government, 2020[1]

Under this vision are four priorities:

- improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy

- closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

- improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing

- improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.

The NIF is conceived as being the connection between four related policies aimed at

addressing these priorities. These are the Curriculum for Excellence, the Scottish Attainment Challenge, Getting It Right for Every Child, and Developing the Young Workforce. A brief description of these policies is set out below.

The NIF also identifies six drivers for improvement. That is, areas of education which are foci of policy work to improve outcomes for young people. These drivers are:

- school leadership

- teacher professionalism

- parental engagement

- assessment of children's progress

- school improvement

- performance information.

An empowered system

The Government's pre-pandemic reforms in the last session were aimed at developing a culture of collaboration and empowerment, where teachers, schools, local authorities, and national bodies would work 'horizontally', that is teachers with colleagues, schools with other schools etc. The most visible example of this is the establishment of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), where local authorities work alongside each other, Education Scotland and others to develop regional interventions and support programmes. There has also been a focus on professional development and career pathways for teachers, prospective and existing headteachers, and other education workers.

Education Scotland has produced a suite of draft guidance on how everyone involved in education can contribute supporting the culture of collaboration and empowerment. [2]

In terms of developing this culture, the Scottish Government appear to have made progress. Audit Scotland's March 2021 report, Improving outcomes for young people through school education stated:

" Before the Covid-19 pandemic, schools, councils and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) were already working together constructively and with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland around a shared vision of improving education outcomes."

Audit Scotland, 2021[3]

Audit Scotland noted that this helped in the "rapid and nationally coordinated response to the pandemic". [3] Nonetheless, embedding the culture across Scotland, including across professions, parents/carers and young people, is still a work in progress.

Curriculum for Excellence

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is Scotland's national curriculum.

CfE is intended to support young people to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. It seeks to support learners to achieve four capacities.

" **The Four Capacities.** To enable all children to become:"

- successful learners"

- confident individuals"

- responsible citizens"

- effective contributors."

CfE covers early years' education to the end of schooling.
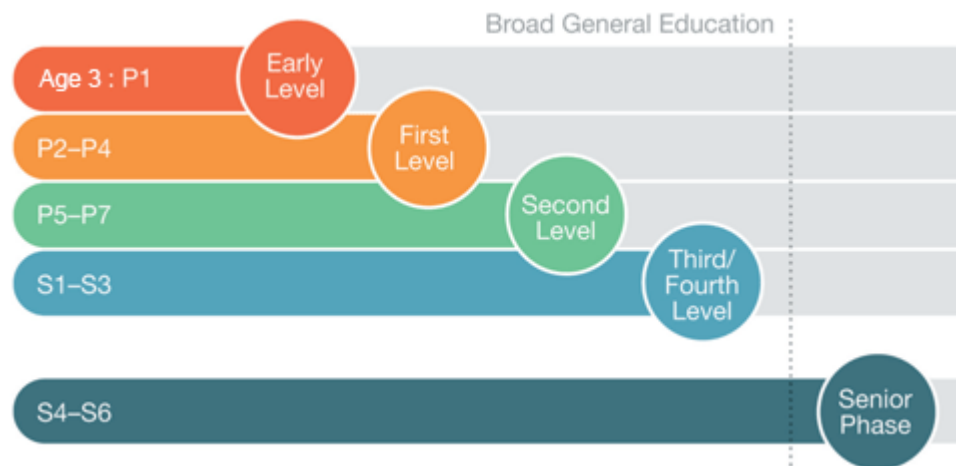
Education Scotland

The diagram above is intended to be indicative. A young person will work through the levels at their own pace. It is the responsibility of the teacher, school or indeed local authority to support the learning for each individual.

The curriculum is organised into eight curriculum areas.

- Expressive arts

- Health and wellbeing

- Languages (including English, Gaidhlig, Gaelic learners and modern languages)

- Mathematics

- Religious and moral education

- Sciences

- Social studies

- Technologies.

In addition there are three cross-cutting areas: health and wellbeing; literacy; and numeracy.

Within these areas and for every level up to CfE level 4, teachers may refer to the Experiences and Outcomes - these are often referred to as Es and Os. Experiences and Outcomes are intended to support the planning of learning and are "are a set of clear and concise statements about children's learning and progression in each curriculum area." [4] Sitting alongside Experiences and Outcomes are Benchmarks. Benchmarks are intended to support teachers to understand whether the learner has achieved a given level in a curriculum area.

The Senior Phase, between years 4 and 6 in secondary school, are not covered by experiences and outcomes or Benchmarks directly. This period is intended for learners to gain qualifications. Teaching time is tight and learning will often be led by the specification of the qualifications.

More broadly, within CfE teachers and schools have space to develop local curricula and curricula models. The intention is that teachers use their professional knowledge, support from colleagues, and understanding of their learners to develop teaching and learning in their school or classroom. [5]

Getting It Right for Every Child

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is Scotland's national policy approach to supporting children's wellbeing. The approach:

- is focused on the needs of the individual child and family.

- is based upon an understanding of a child's wellbeing in the context of the child's situation.

- is based on early intervention.

- requires services to work together using a shared language to support the child's wellbeing.

Education is one of several services that, under GIRFEC, should work together to support a child's wellbeing. Local authorities' role in relation to GIRFEC goes beyond school education and can include social work, for example.

Developing the Young Workforce

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) is the Scottish Government's Youth Employment strategy to better prepare young people for the world of work. It links to school education through career advice and ensuring that learners have a breadth of choices and opportunities to support them into work.

Closing the attainment gap

A key goal of the Scottish Government in the previous session of the Parliament was to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The main policy intervention to achieve this is the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The Scottish Government also has set out 11 key measures to assess progress in closing the attainment gap, which are reported on annually in the NIF.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge focuses on improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. It is funded through the Scottish Government's Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF). Across the last Parliamentary session, the ASF totalled £750 million and the Scottish Government has stated that it will be £1 billion in the current session. The Attainment Scotland Fund had three elements in the last session.

There are nine 'Challenge Authorities' chosen based on levels of deprivation measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). These are: Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. In addition, the Scottish Attainment Challenge provides funding for a number of primary and secondary schools, outwith the Challenge Authorities, with significant proportions of their pupils living in deprived areas. In 2019/20 the Scottish Attainment Challenge disbursed around £50 million on the authority and schools programmes.

Separately, Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is an annual fund of around £120 million disbursed to individual schools through their local authorities each year from 2017-18. Allocations for PEF were based on eligibility for free school meals. This funding reached 95% of publicly funded schools in Scotland. PEF is to be spent at the discretion of the headteacher working in partnership with colleagues and their local authority. In 2021-22, PEF was increased by £20m in response to the pandemic; the total allocation for that year is £147m.

The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund is intended to support targeted initiatives, activities, and resources, that will improve the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people, up to the age of 26. The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund totalled £33 million covering a period from 2018 to the end of Session 5 (May 2021).

There are also a number of national programmes funded through the ASF. These have been for "targeted work to raise attainment and improve equity, including: staffing supply and capacity; professional learning and school leadership; investment in Regional Improvement Collaboratives and a number of third sector organisations." [6]

The Attainment Scotland Fund is ring-fenced. However, the conditions of grant were relaxed in response to the pandemic, allowing for more flexible use of the resource to support children and young people.

Audit Scotland's March 2021 report, Improving outcomes for young people through school education, stated:

" Nationally the poverty-related attainment gap between pupils living in the most and least deprived areas has narrowed across most NIF outcome indicators, but it remains wide. The gap is wider at higher levels of qualifications. The reduction in the poverty-related attainment gap is because the performance of pupils in the most deprived areas has improved more than the performance of those from the least deprived areas. Reducing the poverty-related attainment gap is a complex challenge and will take time but improvement needs to happen more quickly."

Audit Scotland, 2021[3]

In March 2021, the Scottish Government published an evaluation on the Scottish Government's aim to close the attainment gap. This report identified good progress in "closing the poverty-related attainment gap and that the [Attainment Scotland Fund] is having a positive impact." Looking forward, the report indicated that an advisory group would be convened to support the development of a refined approach. Young people's views and other expert advice would also feed into "a whole-system approach whilst further targeting approaches to accelerate recovery and progress and ensure all children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to succeed." [7]

The Scottish Government has committed to continue the ASF this session and increase it to £1 billion over the life of this session. The Scottish Government has set out the allocations and budgets for the 2021-22 year. This includes funding for 'National programmes'

Programme	2021-22 Allocation
Challenge Authorities (TBC)	£43m
Schools Programme (TBC)	£7m
Pupil Equity Fund	£147m
Care Experienced Children and Young People's Fund	£11.6m
National programmes	£6.6m
Totals	**£215.2m**

Scottish Government, 2021[8]

Additional support for learning

A person has 'additional support needs' (ASN) if, for whatever reason, they are unlikely to be able to benefit from school education without additional support.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 provides that local authorities identify the additional support required by every child for whose school education it is responsible and "make adequate and efficient provision" for those children. Local authorities are not bound to provide support that would require unreasonable expenditure, however.

This definition of ASN is broad and includes, for example:

- very able children

- those who may need temporary additional support due to family circumstances such as bereavement

- children with physical or learning disabilities.

The legislation does not list any particular conditions or type of need, except that there is a presumption that looked after children are considered to have additional support needs. Statutory guidance on the 2004 Act provides a non-exhaustive list of conditions, and statistics are gathered on the reasons for schools providing additional support. There is no requirement for diagnoses to access additional support.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 provides for a presumption that children will be educated in mainstream schools unless mainstream provision:

- would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child

- would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated

- would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.

The 2000 Act states that "it shall be presumed that [the circumstances above] arise only exceptionally" (section 15).

The number of pupils identified as having one or more ASN has grown significantly in the past decade. The most recent summary school statistics published in December 2020 show that 32% of pupils were identified as having at least one ASN in September 2020. It is not clear how much of the growth is due to changing identification practice or underlying changes in Scotland's children, however.

The Scottish Government commissioned a review into how additional support for learning works in practice. The review's report, Support for learning: all our children and all their potential ,was published in June 2020. The review identified system-wide improvements to how children with ASN are supported. The Scottish Government published its Additional support for learning: action plan in October 2020 which set out how the review's recommendations would be taken forward. A progress report is expected in October 2021.

Policy drivers for this session

The last session of Parliament saw the Scottish Government undertake a programme of reform particularly aimed at supporting a culture of empowerment and collaboration.

As well as continuing the reforms and policies of the previous session, there are a number of policy drivers the Government, local government and others will be responding to. These include:

- the immediate and longer-term responses to the pandemic

- responding to the OECD's report on CfE.

In addition, the Scottish Government has announced a number of policy initiatives, based on the SNP's 2021 manifesto.

A question for the Government and the Parliament this session will be the extent to which

the various policy drivers and problems fit into the pre-existing policy framework and approach. For example, whether the issues raised and created by the pandemic are to be tackled with the same tools that were developed to achieve the Government's overall aims of equity and excellence prior to the pandemic. Or will the roles and responsibilities across the system need to be re-shaped? The Scottish Government's initial response to the OECD's report suggests that there is appetite for significant change.

Impact of and response to the pandemic

2020 and 2021 have been dominated by the effects of and response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

In March 2020, schools were physically closed to most children. Their education was continued through remote learning. Schools reopened fully in August 2020. However the second national lockdown at the turn of the year once again meant children were, for the most part, learning remotely. In the weeks up to Easter 2021, in person schooling was phased in for different age groups with a full return after the Easter break.

Supporting the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of remote learning has been a key policy focus for national and local government. In addition, how the education system has and will respond to any lost or delayed learning is a priority. Schools are more than places of learning. They are also where children's are supported and plans on returning to schooling have prioritised supporting young people's wellbeing.

With social distancing, the practice of pupils sitting exams had to be rethought. In 2020, there was very little time to develop an alternative certification model. Teachers were asked to estimate pupils' grades. On average estimated pupils grades increased compared to previous years' exams and attempts to moderate the grades were controversial and eventually dropped. Again in 2021, pupils will not sit externally moderated exams. The system for teachers and schools to estimate grades, based on evidence, has a greater level of detail and moderation than was in place for 2020.

The response to the pandemic has required significant efforts from across the system. Teachers, school leaders, local and national agencies have all had to adapt to a fast-changing environment.

Alternative Certification Model 2021

Certification was one of the more controversial aspects of the response to the pandemic in 2020. As Members return to Parliament, schools are gathering evidence to support certification in 2021.

Certification takes place in the Senior Phase of school - in the years S4 - S6. Much of the policy focus has been on academic SQA qualifications of National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers. These are qualifications normally achieved in schools which would usually require the candidate to sit an exam. There are other school qualifications such as National 3s or 4s or vocational qualifications that would not require an exam. The SQA also offers qualifications that would normally be taken in colleges, such as Higher National Certificates or Higher National Diplomas. This section will focus on the arrangements made for exam-based qualifications taken in schools.

The Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was developed by the SQA with reference to the National Qualifications 2021 Group. SQA has identified three key principles of the ACM,

these are:

- fairness to all learners

- safe and secure certification of qualifications, while following the latest public health advice

- maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualifications system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interest of learners. [9]

The ACM is a five stage process.

> " **Stage 1: Until April 2021** Teachers and lecturers accessed subject specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA. **Stage 2: April to May 2021** School, college and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on samples of assessment evidence from each school and college. **Stage 3: End of May to 25 June 2021** Schools, colleges, local authorities and SQA work through final stages of local and national quality assurance and feedback to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair. **Stage 4: By 25 June 2021** Schools and colleges submit quality assured provisional results to SQA. **Stage 5: Appeals process for 2020-21** A free appeals service, available directly to learners for the first time, is the fifth and final stage of the alternative certification model."
>
> SQA, 2021[10]

The SQA provided an update on 13 April 2021 on Stage 2 of the process. This said:

> " The model is based on demonstrated attainment and so assessment evidence is required. To minimise workload, teachers and lecturers should refer to the subject-specific guidance documents published by SQA. Evidence should be gathered under controlled conditions to ensure a degree of equity. It is the quality of evidence which is critical, rather than quantity and therefore there is no need for a large portfolio or ring-binder of classroom based work. There is no requirement to replicate full formal exams or prelims this year. Classroom based assessments should be spread over the remaining weeks to help manage the marking and quality assurance activities as well as reduce pressure on learners."
>
> SQA, 2021[11]

This is consistent with previous overall guidance which advised that teachers use "holistic professional judgement" in determining estimates. [12] Guidance for individual subjects can vary in how the overall guidance is expressed. Two examples from subject specific SQA Guidance are set out below.

> " You can generate the most valid evidence for this course by using the approach exemplified in the SQA question papers and coursework tasks. However, you do not need to simulate an exam setting in order to produce evidence ... Candidates do not need to produce evidence for question paper components on a single occasion (question papers can be split to support assessments you carry out during class time), however it is important that assessment tasks are unseen. (Higher Media) The closer that the evidence is to the standard, format, and duration of the physics course assessment, and the more closely the marking follows the national standard and the Physics General Marking Principles, the more realistic and reliable your estimates should be. (National 5 Physics)"

A key aim of the ACM to ensure reliable certification - that similar candidates' work receive the same grades both this year and compared to previous years. The SQA envisages this being achieved through quality assurance processes. In a letter to the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee, the SQA stated:

> " Local quality assurance ensures consistency and fairness within schools, colleges, and training providers. It is carried out in schools (with support from local authorities where appropriate), colleges and training providers. National quality assurance is carried out by SQA. The aim of national quality assurance is to provide an evidenced based assurance to teachers, lecturers, learners, parents, carers and the wider public that the application of national standards when assessing learner evidence this session is accurate and consistent across the country."
>
> SQA and Education Scotland, 2021[13]

Education Scotland undertook a review of local authorities' approaches to quality assurance as part of the alternative certification model. Education Scotland's report was published on 2 June 2021. In terms of how evidence is being collected, the report identified "an ongoing need for local authorities to ensure that local flexibility, about how and when to carry out assessments, supports young people to achieve". [14] It also concluded:

> " Encouragingly, local authorities are continuing to review and refine their arrangements to ensure that young people achieve fair and credible results. Staff at all levels are reflecting on what is working well and what needs to improve as part of developing approaches to quality assurance."
>
> Education Scotland, 2021[14]

Developing and delivering a new certification system in less than a year is a considerable undertaking. This is likely to attract comment and attention in the first few months of the new Parliament. The experience of certificating learning in this way is also likely to influence debate on any changes to the qualifications system in the future.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills told the Parliament on 22 June the she intended to confirm the Scottish Government's central planning assumption for awarding qualifications in 2022 for the start of the school term in August 2021, taking account of the public health guidance at the time.

Impact and recovery

The pandemic and school closures have impacted on the lives and learning of young people. The Scottish Government has, to date, committed over £400m to supporting the education system through the pandemic (see Annex).

Research into the first period of remote learning suggested that it had a significant impact on pupils' education. A particular concern was how this impacted some pupils more than others, e.g. children from deprived households or those with additional support needs. The Scottish Government's International Council of Education Advisers' (ICEA) 2nd formal report was published in December 2020. Its report was framed by the pandemic and responses to it. The ICEA described the impact of school closures (in the Spring of 2020) and the pandemic.

" The consequences are now well known. Some children benefited – mostly those in more socio-economically advantaged families; those who had parents with time and availability to help; some of those with attention deficits who could now wiggle and move around when they wanted to; those who were shy and could interact more readily online than in-person; older students who could learn online independently; and students who were no longer being bullied in person by their peers. In most cases, though, there were significant problems with access to Wi-Fi or devices, especially among poorer families; lack of available programmes or platforms; malfunctioning or poor quality programmes; students and teachers with insufficiently developed digital skills; challenges of building relationships and connecting emotionally as well as cognitively online; difficulties for many students who were easily distracted in their learning style or did not have a home environment suitable for learning, and who therefore found it hard to operate as self-directed learners in the digital domain. There was also evidence that students with special education needs, English language learners, and/or students who were already struggling with their learning were negatively affected by remote learning."

Scottish Government, 2020[15]

The Scottish Government published Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact of school building closures - equity audit on 13 January 2021. The equity audit focused on the impact of the school closures from March to August 2020. It highlighted evidence that suggests that the negative impacts on attainment and "learning loss" is felt more strongly by socio-economically disadvantaged pupils or schools with higher numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. However, the equity audit also stated that the pandemic has the "potential for impacts on attainment and achievement for all children and young people". [16]

Education Scotland undertook national overviews throughout the period of remote learning in early 2021. The summary document of the first five reports found that the learning and teaching has improved in comparison to May/June 2020, and also areas where more could have been done to support a broad curriculum and rich learning experience for everyone. [17]

It is too early to know exactly what the longer term impact of the pandemic, including the second period of remote learning, will be. Mitigating the effects of the pandemic and supporting recovery from it have been the topic of considerable policy focus. The 2020-21 Programme for Government noted that "a longer term strategy will be required to help address the impact the pandemic has had on some of the most vulnerable children and families."

The Scottish Government has also stated that the recovery from the pandemic will require a deeper commitment to pre-existing education strategic aims and policies. The equity audit concluded:

" Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains a key focus of the Scottish Government. Education remains, by far, the most effective means we have to improve the life chances of all of our young people. That has not changed. If anything, the disproportionate impact that closing our schools had on the most socio-economically disadvantaged in our society has demonstrated even more clearly the vital role that they play."

Scottish Government, 2021[16]

The 2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan (NIF) reflects the

challenges the pandemic has created. The NIF's foreword stated:

> " Education recovery will be key in the year ahead, with a continued focus on health and wellbeing, as well as intensified support for reducing inequity and enabling the highest quality of learning and teaching."
>
> Scottish Government, 2020[1]

There have been a number of proposals in how to catch up learning. For example, the UK Government announced on 2 June 2021 £1.4 billion of funding to support pupils to catch up on learning. This included funding for "15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged school children". The UK Government stated that it has committed £3 billion in total "to help children catch up on what they missed during the pandemic".

The language of "catch up" is challenged in the Scottish education system. Minutes of the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group meeting in March 2021 stated:

> " All [of the group] were keen to turn the narrative from the more negative "lost learning" towards positivity and aspiration. This includes not necessarily talking about 'catching up' or focusing on classroom-based learning, but focusing more on what young people feel they need to support their wellbeing and reconnect with peers and with education in general."
>
> Scottish Government, 2021[18]

The Scottish Government has not produced a separate roadmap or strategy for education recovery. Audit Scotland's March report, Improving outcomes for young people through school education, recommended the Scottish Government should:

> " continue to lead the development of priorities for education recovery and improvement, building on the actions set out in the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for 2021, the Equity Audit and the forthcoming OECD review, being clear about anticipated outcomes and milestones"
>
> Audit Scotland, 2021[3]

Education Scotland has produced guidance to support local authorities and practitioners [19] that are part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge which identified "6 broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures". These were:

- understanding the negative impact of COVID-19

- prioritise re-engagement

- identify those learners most impacted by poverty and COVID-19

- intensify support in the short-term for learners identified

- high quality universal and targeted provision is vital

- long-term strategic vision to close the poverty related attainment gap still required.

While these principles are aimed at schools and local authorities involved in the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the advice is likely to be applicable more widely for local authorities

and schools responding to the effects of the pandemic.

In keeping with the Scottish Government's broad approach to education where significant power sits with local authorities and schools, the specifics of the actions to support education recovery will be left to local decision-makers. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, told Parliament on 3 June 2021:

> " It is right that local authorities, schools and headteachers, who know their pupils best, decide what the package looks like, instead of a diktat from here that assumes one size fits all. That would be the wrong way to go about it. Surely, we should empower schools."
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2021[20] (Col 33)

Before the election, the Scottish Government announced two specific policy interventions. A mentor scheme to improve life chances for young people and £20 million to deliver "a range of activities for children and young people and their families over the summer, ensuring they are provided with opportunities to socialise, play and reconnect within their local communities and environments."

The Scottish Government is also seeking to support the capacity of the education system. It has committed to increasing the education workforce and improving access to online learning for pupils. The First Minister told Parliament on 26 May 2021:

> " We will fund councils for the first phase of our commitment to recruit 3,500 more teachers and classroom assistants. We will begin work to ensure that all children have access to a laptop or tablet."
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2021[21] (Col 11)

The NIF stated that it is important not to seek to simply return to how things were in 2019. It said that the need to "focus on education recovery support, and build a more resilient system, is reflected throughout the improvement activities set out in this NIF and Improvement Plan."

In the longer term, local authorities, schools and teachers may have the opportunity to use the experience of the pandemic to improve teaching and learning and the choices young people have. For example, using online learning to increase the choice of courses available to learners. The Scottish Government's International Council of Education Advisers' second report published in December 2020 said the pandemic "should provoke a fundamental rethink and an associated reconceptualization of roles, responsibilities and relationships within a system so it will be fit for purpose in a post-COVID world." [15]

OECD review

The Scottish Government initially commissioned the OECD in 2019 to undertake a review of the Senior Phase of education – the fourth to sixth years of secondary education. This was in response to criticisms of how changes to the structure of secondary education had worked in practice, particularly the number of qualifications being taken by pupils in S4.

The remit was expanded to include all of the Curriculum for Excellence after a motion was agreed in Parliament which, among other things, called for "a full review of broad general education and how it articulates with the Senior Phase".

The remit of the review included examining:

- curriculum design

- depth and breadth of learning in the Senior Phase (S4-S6)

- local flexibility versus increased prescription

- the transition from S1-S3 to S4-S6

- vocational and academic learning and awards

- roles and responsibilities in relation to the curriculum.

The OECD's report, Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, was published on 21 June 2021. [22] A notable feature of the report is the breadth of the commentary, conclusions and recommendations. The report noted some of the strengths of the education system in Scotland, including: CfE's vision; apparent improvement for disadvantaged students; stakeholder involvement and a shared language; and an improved capacity of teachers and school leaders to create local curricula. Some of the areas where the report identified room for improvement included: the fragmented and crowded landscape and clarity of roles and responsibilities; the conceptualisation of knowledge, skills and competencies in the curriculum; a clearer longer-term strategy for CfE; appropriate assessment throughout CfE, including the Senior Phase; communication; and the comparatively high rate of teachers' class contact time.

The report's foreword stated:

> " 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."
>
> OECD, 2021[22]

Chapter 5 of the OECD's report sets out its recommendations and includes a discussion under each one. These discussions provide context and suggestions on what actions might be considered in developing responses to the recommendations. The report's recommendations were grouped under four themes:

- Balance CfE so children and young people can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from 3-18

- Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities

- Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change

- Lead the next steps of CfE with a long-term focus.

The Scottish Government responded to the report on 22 June, the day after publication of the report, and accepted all of the OECD's recommendations. [23] In response to one recommendation, the Scottish Government announced its intention to move the inspection function from Education Scotland and to create a curriculum and assessment agency. This would replace the SQA and take on the curriculum support function of Education Scotland. [24] This change will not be immediate. The Scottish Government has appointed Professor Ken Muir CBE to lead the work on how this plan will be implemented. This work is

expected to be completed around January 2022. [25]

The OECD's expert advice has weight, but the OECD's team is not responsible or accountable for the education system in Scotland. What implementing the recommendations means in practice at a national and local level will be the subject of debate in the coming months and years.

In response to the 2020 SQA Results, the Scottish Government also asked the OECD to expand its work to also include a deeper focus on the future of student assessment and qualifications approaches in the Senior Phase curriculum in Scotland. [26] This work is a comparative analysis of different models used internationally and is expected to be published by the end of August 2021. This second report will inform potential future reforms to how learning is certificated in Senior Phase.

Recent policy developments

The SNP made a number of manifesto commitments, which the Scottish Government has stated it will take forward.

These include:

- developing the provision of wraparound care and after-school clubs

- expanding universal free school meals in primary schools

- continuing and expanding the Attainment Scotland Fund

- supporting the recruitment of 3,500 more teachers and classroom assistants

- removing charges for curricular activities and music tuition

- providing access to digital devices.

In addition, the SNP's manifesto stated it would "establish a National Digital Academy to enable people to study for Highers at any time, any place, any age". [27]

Measuring progress

A frustration for policy scrutineers and commentators has been a lack of consistent long-run data on education outcomes and performance. This makes evaluation of policy changes difficult or reliant on a small number of sources.

One of those sources is the OECD's triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The most recent PISA study of 2018 found that the performance of Scotland's 15-year-olds in reading was similar to that of England but the performance in maths and science was worse. Scotland's absolute performance has declined under some of PISA's measures since the 2000's.

Audit Scotland's March 2021 report, Improving outcomes for young people through school education, included a number of recommendations directed at the Scottish Government in

relation to data and how to monitor progress. [3]

Audit Scotland also noted that the pandemic has created a discontinuity in the data. For example, the Achievement of CfE Levels (ACEL) was not undertaken in 2020 and the basis on which National Qualifications have and will be awarded in 2020 and 2021 differs to previous years.

The education system is complex and linking outcomes to any one policy intervention is challenging under normal circumstances. The uncertainty of the impact of the pandemic on outcomes in the coming years creates added complications.

Structures and key players

The second half of this briefing outlines the key agencies and organisations in the Scottish education system. As noted in the section above on the OECD review, the Scottish Government plans to reform the roles of Education Scotland and the SQA.

Role of the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government provides strategic direction to the education system as a whole. For example, it publishes a National Improvement Framework and National Improvement Plan every year which sets the strategic priorities and measures progress.

The Scottish Government collects and publishes statistics on the school system. These include:

- how pupils are achieving against CfE levels at various stages through school

- annual pupil and teacher censuses

- data on qualifications and destinations for school leavers

- assessments of the school estate

- financial information from local government.

Scottish Government funding for school education is mainly through unrestricted revenue grants to local government, which are then spent by local authorities on local education services. A relatively small amount is in the form of ring-fenced grants, such as the Pupil Equity Fund.

The Government tends to seek a collaborative policy approach with partners. The Scottish Government can also commission reviews or research, which support policy changes.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

The SQA's functions are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. The organisation has two main roles: accreditation, and awarding qualifications. It is best known for its development of qualifications that most young people will take in the Senior Phase or in college.

Schools, colleges and learners have freedom in relation to the types of qualifications to offer or take although, in practice, most 'academic' qualifications taken in schools in Scotland are run by the SQA.

The SQA's qualifications are benchmarked against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The SCQF is a useful tool to understand the relationship between different qualifications from school awards to doctoral degrees.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland is "the national body for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching". [28] Education Scotland advises Scottish Ministers on matters of education policy.

Education Scotland has two main functions. It is Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, inspecting schools, colleges, early years settings, education authorities and other settings. It also provides curricular guidance and support. In the past few years, Education Scotland has moved toward a regional structure, being a key part of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives. It also has responsibility for the Scottish College for Education Leadership.

During the pandemic, Education Scotland's focus has been on supporting e-learning and the quality of remote and blended learning approaches.

Education Scotland is an arm's length agency of the Scottish Government. Its inspection function is independent of the Scottish Government, insofar as the conclusions of inspections. The Scottish Government can direct inspections in terms of what or who are inspected.

Parents/carers and young people

Parents have a statutory duty to ensure their children receive efficient and suitable education. Normally this is through ensuring attendance at a school.

At a local level, local authorities must promote the establishment of Parent Councils in schools and support their operation. At a national level, the two largest parents' groups are the National Parent Forum Scotland ("NPFS") and Connect.

The NPFS was established in 2009 following the introduction of Parent Councils by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) 2006 Act. The Forum aims to support parental involvement in education and provides a parental perspective at a national level. The Forum is parent-led and comprises volunteer parent representatives from each local authority area, who communicate with Parent Councils and support parent involvement at a local level.

Connect was known formerly as the Scottish Parent Teacher Council and is a membership organisation, whose membership is largely comprised of Parent Councils or Parent Teacher Associations.

Schools will normally have pupil councils. Schools are encouraged to expand pupil engagement beyond such formal structures and into decisions around teaching, learning and assessment, opportunities for personal development, and engaging in the wider community. [29] This is in line with a greater focus on children's rights.

The Scottish Youth Parliament is a youth-led elected body for young people aged 14-25. The Children's Parliament works with younger children to ensure their voices are heard on a range of issues. There are a number of other organisations that support young people's voices to be heard.

Local authorities may include representatives of both young people and parents on local

education committees.

Local government

The governance and responsibility for school education in Scotland is largely a matter for the local authorities in their capacity as education authorities. Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, education authorities have a duty "to secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education". [30] Education authorities have wide discretion in how they fulfil this duty.

Audit Scotland's March 2021 report, Improving outcomes for young people through school education, stated:

> " There is wide variation in performance across councils, including examples of worsening performance in some councils on some indicators. Up to 2018/19, most attainment measures, including performance in exams, had been improving at a national level, but the rate of improvement has been inconsistent across the different measures."
>
> Audit Scotland, 2021[3]

Education authorities are represented collectively through the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) and COSLA.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) are a relatively new addition to the education policy landscape. RICs are not intended to be formal parts of the education system, rather they are forums where local authorities come together along with Education Scotland to improve education in their region. The aim of RICs is to facilitate existing and new ways for local authorities to collaborate.

There are six RICs, involving between three and eight local authorities. They are:

- **Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative** - Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian Councils

- **Northern Alliance** - Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils.

- **South East Collaborative** - City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Fife, Midlothian and Scottish Borders Councils.

- **South West Collaborative** - East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils.

- **Tayside Collaborative** - Angus, Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils.

- **West Partnership** - East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West

Dunbartonshire Councils.

RICs in their current form were constituted at the beginning of 2018 when they submitted their first regional improvement plans. Prior to this, three collaboratives had already been formed: the Northern Alliance, the West Partnership and the Tayside Children's Services Collaborative (which also included the local NHS health board). Stirling and Clackmannanshire councils also had experience of working closely together to deliver school education. Education Scotland is a partner in all of the RICs and, to support their operation, Education Scotland has regionalised its support to local authorities and schools.

Teachers

Teachers and headteachers are intended to have significant autonomy in curriculum design and teaching and learning in Scotland's schools.

There are number of trade unions that organise in schools. In terms of teaching unions, the biggest trade union is the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS). Other teaching unions include the NASUWT, the SSTA, the SLS, and the AHDS. UNISON organises among school staff including classroom assistants.

Teachers' pay and conditions

Teachers' pay and conditions are subject to national negotiations through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT). The SNCT is a tripartite body comprising members from teaching unions, Local Authorities, and the Scottish Government.

The SNCT Handbook covers a wide range of issues including pay and duties.

Teaching salaries are therefore set nationally and separately to other local authority staff, including non-teaching school staff.

General Teaching Council for Scotland

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) regulates the teaching profession. One cannot become a teacher in Scotland without registering with the GTCS.

The GTCS also sets the Professional Standards for teachers. Updated Professional Standards will come into effect in August 2021. There are different standards for probationers, registered teachers and school leaders. The Standard for Full Registration states:

> " The Professional Standards outline what it means to become, to be and to grow as a teacher in Scotland. A commitment to the professional values of social justice, trust and respect and integrity are at the heart of the Professional Standards and underpin our relationships, thinking and professional practice in Scotland."

General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021[31]

Teacher education

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in Scotland are accredited by the GTCS. ITE in Scotland is provided by universities and the Royal Conservatoire for Scotland in partnership with schools and local education authorities.

The programmes for ITE are generally either 4 year degree programmes or 1 year Post Graduate Diploma of Education courses. In either case, the student teacher is required to undertake placements in schools.

Newly qualified teachers are Provisionally Registered with the GTCS and only attain Full Registration on successful completion of the Teacher Induction Scheme - their probation year - or through a 'Flexible Route'.

ITE is the beginning of Teacher Education. After attaining full registration, teachers are expected to be committed to career-long professional learning.

Annex: Additional committed expenditure on education in response to the pandemic (as at June 2021) [32]

- £90 million to support local authorities in implementing protection measures to ensure schools are safe, open and welcoming

- £51 million for free school meal alternatives during the period of remote learning and school holidays

- £190 million to support local authorities to recruit additional teachers and other staff to deploy more support to their schools, children and families to support education recovery

- £25 million to provide further devices and connectivity

- £20 million to allow local authorities to deploy more support to their schools and families as they deal with the challenges of remote learning during lockdown

- £3 million supporting targeted youth work services to support children's wellbeing and to engage with children who most need our support

- £20 million as part of a Covid-related Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) premium

- £20 million over summer 2021 to improve physical and mental health, address issues of social isolation and lack of access to normal activities

- £1.5 million for workforce support

- £19.4 million to support a six year mentoring programme

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