Implementing Education Policies

The Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland: an implementation assessment

31 January 2021
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Confidential draft report for comments. Not for dissemination.

OECD

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Introduction and methodology

In 2019, the Scottish Government invited the OECD to conduct an assessment to take stock of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and to identify areas for potential development to ensure that it contributes as effectively as possible to the education of young people in Scotland. This draft report presents the results of the assessment. It was developed as part of the OECD Implementing Education Policies programme (Box). As a first draft, it is work in progress by the OECD team and not meant for dissemination.

CfE is Scotland's comprehensive curriculum policy, developed between 2004 and 2010 and first implemented in 2011. The OECD assessment focuses on CfE in broad general education and senior phase (upper secondary education), from an implementation perspective. It uses the OECD framework on education policy implementation (Figure 1) to review how CfE has been implemented, and provides options to consider for next steps. The framework highlights that analysing the implementation of an education policy requires looking at the dimensions of policy design, stakeholder engagement, and policy context, and how they weave in together to turn the policy into reality (Viennet and Pont 2017, Gouëdard, Viennet and Pont 2020).

Figure 1.1. IEP framework
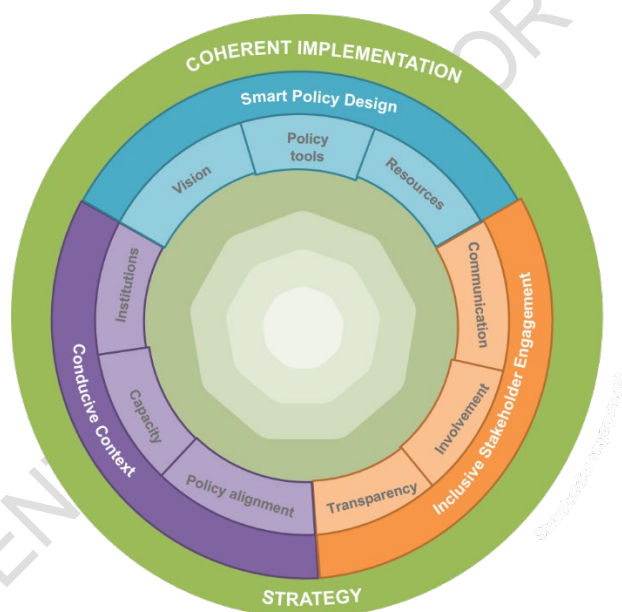
Source: OECD, 2020.

To undertake this analysis, the OECD formed a team of OECD analysts and external experts of curriculum and assessment implementation (Annex 1). The OECD team carried out a desk-based analysis of policy documents, evidence and research on CfE implementation. The sheer number of existing publications about CfE are testament to the system's commitment to continuous educational improvement. Key documents in the corpus included, but were not limited to:

- the Building the Curriculum series and complementary policy documents developed at central and local levels;
- a previous OECD review of the Scottish education system (OECD, 2015[1]);
- reports and evidence submitted to Scottish Parliament commissions;

- reports commissioned by the Scottish Government and CfE governance committees;
- the initial evidence pack compiling information and case studies on key issues of CfE and its implementation. The document was produced by the Scottish Government with help from a large number of key stakeholders, for the purpose of the OECD assessment (unpublished);
- published academic articles and ongoing research reports;
- position papers and studies carried out about CfE by major stakeholders in the system.

Against the rich backdrop of existing documentation of CfE and its implementation, the OECD team conducted a series of online group interviews and virtual school visits to gather primary data. The team undertook policy and school visits, including interviews with key stakeholders from across the Scottish education system and with practitioners, learners and their parents to complement the evidence base. The team met with representatives of over forty macro and meso-level organisations, five scholars and four stakeholder committees during the first week. Additional interviews with four more scholars were also conducted between October and November 2020. The second week was dedicated to visiting five schools and meeting with additional practitioners and beneficiaries from across Scotland, resulting in discussions with stakeholders from fourteen schools in total. School visits started with a review of their curriculum model, prior to holding meetings with school leadership, teachers, parents and learners. The group interviews consisted in 1h15-long meetings with groups of four to eight practitioners, learners, and parents. Detailed agenda for each mission week and additional scholar interviews can be found in Annex 2.

Box 1.1. Implementing policies: supporting change in education

OECD's Implementing Education Policies programme offers peer learning and tailored support for countries and jurisdictions to help them achieve success in the implementation of their education policies and reforms. Tailored support is provided on topics on which the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills has comparative expertise, including (but not limited to): introducing new curriculum, developing schools as learning organisations, teacher policy, evaluation, assessment and accountability arrangements/education monitoring systems and building educational leadership capacity. The tailored support consists of three complementary strands of work that aim to target countries' and jurisdictions' needs to introduce policy reforms and impactful changes:

- Policy assessments take stock of the selected policy and change strategy, analyse strengths and challenges and provide concrete recommendations for enhancing and ensuring effective implementation. It follows a concrete methodology: a desk study of policy documents, a three to five day assessment visit, in which an OECD team of experts interviews a range of key stakeholders from various levels of the education system, and additional exchanges with a project steering or reference group.

- Strategic advice is provided to education stakeholders and tailored to the needs of countries and jurisdictions. It can consist of reviewing policy documents (e.g. white papers or action plans), contributing to policy meetings, or facilitating the development of tools that support the implementation of specific policies.

- Implementation seminars can be organised to bring together education stakeholders involved in the reform or change process, for them to discuss, engage and shape the development of policies and implementation strategies.

Website: http://www.oecd.org/education/implementing-policies/
Brochure: http://www.oecd.org/education/implementing-education-policies-flyer.pdf

All school visits and stakeholder interviews were conducted online, due to the COVID-19 crisis and travel restrictions, using secure online videoconferencing platforms and following the OECD's policy on personal data protection. Although this setting prevented the collection of observational data in schools' classrooms, it allowed for qualitative group interviews with learners at various stages of education, and with teachers and school leaders from schools located in ten different local authorities. The OECD team checked the evidence gathered from these interviews and virtual school visits for consistency against relevant research and findings from trusted sources when they already exist, which brought additional confirmation to this report's findings.

This report presents the analysis and results of the OECD team analysis. It is structured as follows:

- this chapter introduces the context of the assessment, provides an overview of the Scottish education system, its performance, policies and tensions, and provides a conclusion on issues to consider for CfE policy. The following chapters then analyse the central dimensions to the implementation of CfE.
- Chapter 2 analyses the design of CfE, current good practices and considerations for CfE to be most effective for Scottish young people;
- Chapter 3 analyses stakeholders' engagement with CfE, how they have engaged as part of the implementation process, and how engagement could improve in the future;
- Chapter 4 analyses the policy environment of CfE, and how its contextual dimensions can contribute or hinder progress with CfE;
- Chapter 5 brings together the different dimensions to provide a coherent and actionable implementation perspective for CfE next steps.

The Scottish economic and social context

Scotland is a country of the United Kingdom, boarded to the south by England, to the east by the North Sea, and by the Atlantic ocean to the west and north. Scotland has a population of around 5.46 million, approximately one third of the United Kingdom's mainland area, including 1.03 million (19%) aged under 18. The Highlands, in the north and northwest of mainland Scotland, and the Borders, to the south, are sparsely populated, while the central belt accounts for the bulk of the population. Scotland also has a large number of islands, many off the west coast and with Orkney and Shetland to the north (OECD 2015). Scotland's population is at a record high and has been growing steadily since the turn of the century. This has been driven mainly by net inward migration as opposed to births and the population of children has declined slightly over this period (Evidence pack). The ethnic minority population of Scotland has grown rapidly over the last decade and diversity in Scottish schools is increasing as a result. Many languages such as Polish, Urdu and Punjabi are spoken in communities and schools along English, as well as the heritage languages of Gaelic and Scots.

The Scottish economy is structured as most advanced economies, with services accounting for most of economic output (about 75 % in 2016) and employment. Key sectors in Scotland include oil and gas; food industry; energy, including a growing renewable energy sector; financial services; tourism; creative industries; and education. The Scottish economy was performing well before the COVID-19 crisis. Annual GDP growth rates remained positive, between 0.7% and 1.5% between 2016 and 2019, and unemployment was at historically low levels, at 3.5% in 2019 (Scottish Government State of the Economy September 2019). By comparison, annual growth rates for the United Kingdom as a whole were slightly higher (between 1.2% and 2.2% in 2016-2019) while the overall unemployment rate remained slightly higher (3.8% in 2019), the country being affected by the uncertainty around Brexit negotiations.

The COVID-19 crisis provoked serious contractions to the Scottish economy, like in other economies, amounting to 21.4% fall in GDP over the first half of 2020 (latest available data), in line with the 22.1%

contraction in the United Kingdom's economy overall. The impact on different economic sectors varied according to the extent of corresponding restrictions, but the fall in output was spread relatively evenly across sectors. For comparison purposes, Scotland's GDP fell around 4% over six quarters during the global financial crisis. The quarterly unemployment rate for May-July 2020 increased by 0.7% compared to the similar point the previous year (Scottish Government State of the Economy September 2020).

Around 19% (1 020 000 individuals) of the population of Scotland were in relative poverty in 2016-19 (after housing costs). Over half were in poverty despite having at least one working adult in the household. This proportion increases for children, with almost a quarter (24%, around 230 000 children) (Scottish Government 2020).

At the time of writing this report, two factors influenced the political context around Scotland's education. First, parliamentary elections are planned in May 2021. As part of the United Kingdom, Scotland's politics operate under the Kingdom's constitutional monarchy, through Scottish representation at the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and within Scotland's own legislative and executive institutions. Since the Scotland Act of 1998, the Scottish Parliament took on full legislative responsibility for a range of devolved competencies, including education. The Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are elected every five years, following which the leader of the party with majority support in Parliament is usually nominated candidate for First Minister and appointed by the Queen. The First Minister heads the Scottish Government, determines portfolios and appoints other ministers and cabinet secretaries with the approval of Parliament and the Queen. At the time of writing this report, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was in majority. It has held majority since the previous election in 2011 and kept education as one of their top policy priorities since then.

Second, the COVID-19 crisis. Like the majority of countries, Scotland was hit by the COVID-19 crisis, which resulted in school closures, adaptations to the national qualification examination diets and other changes that could possibly mark the education system for the long term. The COVID-19 pandemic was first declared to have spread in Scotland on 1 March 2020, after which schools closed on 20 March along with a number of other sectors and the 2020 national exam diet was cancelled. Scotland followed the rest of the United Kingdom into lockdown from 23 March until the end of May when restrictions started easing. Education continued following a remote learning model until the summer, with a number of government initiatives aiming to guarantee that all students could have access to a computer and reliable internet connection. Schools opened again in August, with students allowed back into classrooms following safety protocols until the end of 2020.

An overview of the Scottish education system

Governance and funding

Scotland has a long tradition of organising its own education system and wields full legislative power and executive authority in all areas of education since the Scotland Act of 1998. In the current government, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is also the Deputy First Minister and has overall responsibility for Scottish education, in collaboration with supporting ministers sharing responsibilities in specific areas, and with support from relevant administration, including the Learning Directorate. The Scottish Government, via the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, sets broad national policy for all aspects of education. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the framework for curriculum policy set at central level, upon which schools and practitioners build their own curriculum adapted to the needs of their learners, and to their local context. The Learning Directorate works with statutory agencies to implement policies, including Education Scotland (educational improvement and inspection), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Scottish Funding Council (funding teaching and research in higher and further education). More details can be found in Chapter 3.

Responsibility for organising, operating and staffing the school system within the Scottish Government's policy guidelines is decentralised. The 32 local authorities, run by councils elected every four years, deliver a wide array of services including schools, housing and social work, and are committed to pursuit of national educational objectives. The local authorities have direct responsibility for schools, hiring school staff, providing and financing most educational services and implementing Scottish Government policies in education. Local authorities help schools design and implement their curriculum based on the CfE framework. In 2017, Scotland introduced a new layer of educational governance by establishing six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) across the country to bring local authorities together alongside the central administration, and collaborate more effectively for greater equity and quality in education.

Local authorities fund schools via local funding, except for specific funding of national programmes such as the pupil equity funding. Since 2007, education funding has been rolled into the local government settlement, leaving it to local authorities to prioritise funding and allocate budgets. The Scottish Government provides 70% of all local government revenue, while the remaining 30% are business rates and council tax levied on residents. In 2018/19, BP 5.5 million were spent in total on all education levels in Scotland, an increase of 4.9% in real terms since 2013/14. The Scottish Government still allocates specific resources, including for CfE-related spending (BP12.3 billion in 2019/20). Head teachers across local authorities are devolved 80% or more of school-based funding. Revised DSM guidelines 2012 empower head teachers to meet local needs and deliver the best possible outcomes for young learners, in line with the objectives of CfE, GIRFEC and the Early Years Framework (Evidence pack).

Schools are responsible for the quality of education they offer to their students, and answer to their local authority, including by publishing annual improvement plans based on objectives set with their local authority. Schools' responsibility has increased under CfE, to ensure the quality of education and the curriculum's ability to meet learners' needs. Based on the national CfE framework, individual schools develop their own "curriculum rationale", which forms the basis of the school's approach to addressing learning needs. Rationales are expected to be developed with staff, parents, carers, local partners and the youth in the school community.

School education structure

The education system counts around 2 500 schools serving learners from 3 years old, with 96% in publicly funded local authority-managed schools. The publicly funded school system caters to more than 787 000 students up to upper secondary education and employs more than 49 000 teachers (Table). Operated by non-public entities, independent schools (about 100 in 2020) provide education for over 30 000 students. In 2019, 114 publicly funded schools for special education needs were also operating, serving 7 132 students, although the majority of the students with an additional support need recorded (more than 30% of all students) go to mainstream schools. The Scottish school system also includes Gaelic Medium Education (GME), which aims for young learners to function fluently in both Gaelic and English through primary and secondary education. There are 8 stand-alone GME primary schools (out of the 2 004 total primary schools), 52 primary schools with a GME and EME (English Medium Education) stream in the same school, and 32 Secondary schools that offer GME subjects (out of 358 secondary schools in total).

Table 1.1. Descriptive data per level of education in Scotland (UK)

	ECEC ("Early learning and childcare), publicly funded	Primary education	Secondary education		Independent schools	Special schools
			BGE[1]	Senior Phase		
Number of pupils	96 375 (Sep. 2019)	398 794	164 397	127 666	30 000	7 132

Number of schools (or ECEC centres)	2 576	2 004	358		100	114
Number of teachers or qualified staff	798 (Sep. 2019)	25 027	23 522		*	**1 927**
Pupil teacher ratio	*	15.9	12.4		*	**3.7**
Enrolment rates	98% of eligible 3-4 year-olds	*	*	*	*	**n/a**
Number of schools offering GME (either stand-alone or with EME)	*	60	32		*	**n/a**

Notes: 1: BGE stands for "Broad General Education", which encompasses early learning, primary and lower secondary education levels. * Missing data.
2: All data based on latest published data as of May 2020
Source: Scottish Government, 2020, Evidence pack

According to the Scottish Government's classification of school locations, 31% of the students attending publicly funded schools went to a school in a large urban area and 42% attend in smaller urban areas. The remaining 27% attend schools in accessible small town (9%), remote small town (5%), accessible rural areas (8%) and remote rural areas (4%) (Evidence pack).

The school system is organised in sequential levels summarised in Table. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) caters for children aged 3 to 18, beyond the boundaries of compulsory education (ages 5-16 in Scotland). Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC, referred to as "early learning and childcare" in Scotland) is provided for those up to 5 years of age (ISCED 0) and while it is not compulsory, 98% of eligible children aged 3 and 4 are registered in 2020. Children aged 3 to 4 are entitled to 20 hours per week of unconditional free access to ECEC, which is fewer than most OECD countries (EAG 2020). At the time of drafting this report, the Scottish Government was phasing in an expansion that will almost double this hourly entitlement for early years, from 600 hours to 1 140 hours per year (Evidence pack).

Primary education provides for children ages 5 to 12 (ISCED 1) as the first part of what is commonly known as "BGE" (Broad General Education) under CfE. Starting at age 5 in Scotland, compulsory education starts earlier than in most OECD countries, where students are required to start primary education at the age of 6 or 7. The seven years of primary education place Scotland's duration above OECD average, at the same length as in Australia, Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Students usually complete primary education by age 11 or 12 (EAG 2019).

Secondary schools offer up to six years of education, similarly to the OECD average (EAG 2019). Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) formally continues the BGE cycle with three years (S1 to S3). The following three years (S4 to S6) form the upper secondary education cycle, known as the "Senior Phase" under CfE. Students typically sit most of their national qualification exams during the Senior Phase, with S4 being the last year of compulsory education. In 2020, 61.2% of school leavers were in S6, 26.8% in S5 and 11.9% in S4 (Scottish Government, 2020, Evidence pack). Most learners continue studying beyond the compulsory age of 16 in upper secondary education. Under Curriculum for Excellence, upper secondary levels aim to offer a variety of educational pathways and a broad range of qualifications to diversify students' experience:

- General upper secondary education (sometimes referred to as "traditional" by Scottish stakeholders) covers three years at ISCED 3 for ages 15 to 18. It is offered in secondary schools and is mainly geared to the continuation of studies at higher education (ISCED 6 to 8). Recent evolutions under CfE offer an increasing number of vocational opportunities within general education, including modern apprenticeships for instance, or additional courses taken in colleges;
- Vocational educational pathways are offered in colleges of further education (ISCED 3) with opportunities to continue on to professional studies and higher education (ISCED 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Table 1.2. Structure of education provision in Scotland (UK)

Age	ISCED	Education level	Institutions
2/3 – 5	0	Early learning and childcare	
5 – 12	1	Primary: 7 years, P1 to P7 (compulsory)	Primary schools
12 - 15	2	Secondary: 3 years, S1 to S3 (compulsory)	Secondary schools: comprehensive and mostly co-ed
15 – 18	3	Upper secondary: 3 years, S4 (compulsory) and S5 to S6 (optional). Subjects studied at different levels for NQual	Secondary schools Or colleges of further education
16+	3	Vocational training	Colleges or independent providers
		Further education (non-advanced courses: vocational and general studies, etc) Higher education (advanced courses: Higher National certificate, HN Diploma, etc)	Colleges
17+	5	Higher education: HNCertificate, HNDiploma, professional training courses and post-grad	Higher education institutions (universities and colleges)

Source: OECD education diagrams (UK), Eurydice and Education Scotland

Scotland has worked to modify significantly its vocational education since 2015, including adapting colleges to cater more efficiently to learners' needs. Colleges offer vocationally oriented courses, with studies predominantly leading straight to employment within a specific industry. Regular course levels include Higher National Certificate (one year to complete) and Higher National Diploma (two years). For students in the Senior Phase of schooling, colleges work to increase the number of vocational opportunities available to young learners and help them complete vocational courses alongside general courses. Colleges also work in partnership with local authorities and employers to deliver Modern Apprenticeships (MA) programmes. They also work in partnership with employers to prepare students for work, and with universities to allow some fast track degree entry.

There is no school-leaving certificate in Scotland. Students in upper secondary education may take a number of "national courses" leading to externally approved national qualifications. Students need at least four higher qualifications to enter universities, although the requirements can be stricter for more competitive degrees.

Teachers and school leaders

In Scotland, all teachers need a graduate degree or equivalent plus a teaching qualification to gain Qualified Teacher Status. Teaching qualifications include undergraduate degrees (Bed, BA, BSc; ISCED 6) and postgraduate qualifications (PDGE; ISCED 7). For all levels of education (pre-primary to upper secondary), the minimum qualifications required for the Standard for Full Registration are a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) and Postgraduate teaching qualification (ISCED 7) or a Bachelor's degree in education (ISCED 6) (EAG 2019 Annex 3). The Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) specifies what is expected of a student teacher at the end of Initial Teacher Education seeking provisional registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). Having gained the SPR, all provisionally registered teachers continue their professional learning journey by moving towards the attainment of the Standard for Full Registration (SFR). The SFR is the gateway to the profession and benchmark of teacher competence for all teachers (EAG 2019 Annex 3).

At lower secondary level, teachers in Scotland spend 63% of their working time on teaching, which is higher than OECD average (43%). Scotland's are among teachers of the only OECD countries who spend at least 50% of their statutory working time teaching, with Chile, Israel, Latvia and Spain (EAG 2019). Regulations state that teachers at all levels of education have a working week of 35 hours and they are

expected to be in school 1 045 hours per year. Five additional in-service days per year are reserved without class teaching. During their working time, teachers in most countries are required to perform various non-teaching tasks such as lesson planning/preparation, marking students' work and communicating or co-operating with parents or guardians.

That teachers are required to teach the same number of hours across levels of education makes Scotland one of few systems, while it is more common in OECD countries and economies to see teaching time decrease as the level of education increases. Teaching time has evolved in Scotland between 2000 and 2019: it dropped by 95 hours at pre-primary and primary levels, as part of a teachers' agreement that introduced the 35-hour working week (A teaching profession for the 21st century" 2001), resulting in maximum 22.5 hours of teaching per week for primary, secondary and special education teachers. Even with this decrease in net contact time, the maximum time that teachers at these levels can be required to teach is still longer than the OECD average (EAG 2019). Teachers are also expected to complete 35 hours of professional development per annum in Scotland. Professional development is excluded from statutory teaching time (EAG 2019 Annex 3).

In Scotland, official documents on school leaders' ("head teachers") working conditions do not detail their responsibilities and tasks. This is the case for about one-quarter of OECD countries with available information, including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. By comparison, regulations explicitly outline expectations for school heads' managerial and leadership roles in more than half of the OECD and partner countries with available data (EAG 2020). In 2018, the Scottish Government and local authorities agreed on a Head teachers' Charter, committing local authorities to support school leaders as the drivers of school improvement and devolving greater responsibility to them in decision-making and resource use.

Attainment

Improving employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people is one of the Scottish Government's key priorities. More than 60% of 2018/2019 school leavers achieved 1+ qualification passes at SCQF level 6 or better (e.g. Higher), 85% had 1+ passes at SCQF level 5 or better (e.g. National 5), and 95.9%attained attained 1+ pass at SCQF level 4 or better (e.g. National 4). Overall, official Scottish statistics report a reduction in all levels of attainment in National Courses (i.e. in the courses taken for completion of a national qualification) and a widening attainment of vocationally oriented qualifications, since courses in support of CfE were first assessed. The Scottish Government highlighted that recent changes to SCQF qualifications, including creation of new vocationally oriented courses and changes to national courses, mean that a comparison in attainment rates with years on a long time period are complex and could be erroneous (Scottish Government, 2020, Evidence pack).

Scotland counts 95% of positive destinations according to Government's measures, among its students leaving school in 2018/2019, the highest since 2009/2010. Following compulsory education, school leavers in Scotland mostly go to higher education (40.3%), further education (27.3%) and into employment (22.9%). Out of the remaining 10%, half go to "other positive destinations" (4.5%) (Government of Scotland, 2020, Summary statistics for attainment). In 2019, Scotland's Annual Participation Measure showed that 91.6% of 16-19 year olds were participating meaning they were in some form of education, employment or training and other personal development for most of the year. This ranged from 85.8 per cent of young people in the most deprived areas to 96.3 per cent in the least deprived areas. This is a gap of 10.5 percentage points. This gap has been narrowing over time as the proportion of young people from the most deprived areas who are participating has increased faster than has the proportion of young people from the least deprived areas (Government of Scotland, 2020, Evidence pack).

Student performance

15-year-olds' level in literacy, numeracy and science skills

Scotland has ranked among higher-than-average country performers on international assessments such as PISA, usually scoring at or above OECD average in mathematics, reading and science. Scotland's performance declined between 2009 and 2018, similarly to average OECD performance, except in reading where performance rose again between 2015 and 2018 (Figure). In 2018, Scotland's average score on the PISA test in reading was 504 score points, which represented an eleven score-point improvement on its 2015 score almost on par with its 2012 performance, and a higher performance than the OECD average. In mathematics, Scotland performed at OECD average with 489 score points, similar to its 2015 scores but lower than 2012. In science, Scotland scored at OECD average (490 score points), with declining scores since 2012.

Figure 1.2. Average performance in reading, mathematics and science in Scotland and the OECD, PISA 2012-2018
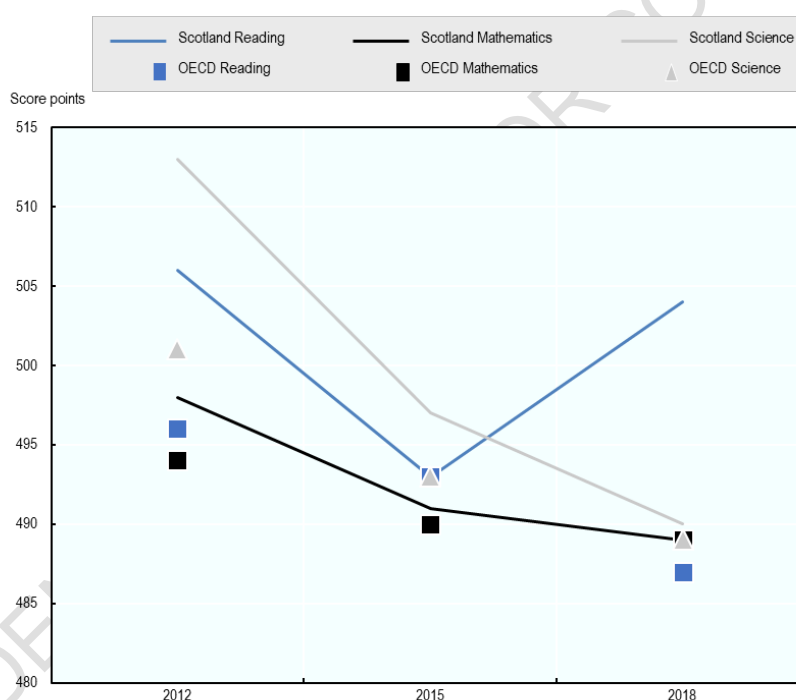
Source: OECD, 2020.

In 2018, Scotland's proportion of top performers in reading (10.3%) was higher than in 2015, and higher than OECD average (8.7%), while the proportion of low performers (15.5%) was similar to 2015, and smaller than OECD average (22.6%). Scotland's proportions of top performers were slightly higher than OECD average in science and close to average in mathematics (slightly over 10%), both similar to the respective proportions in 2015. The proportions of low performers were close to OECD averages in mathematics (23.5%) and science (21.1%), and also similar to the respective proportions in 2015 (PISA 2018 Results vol I, Table I.B2.1, I.B2.2, and I.B2.3).

Students' progress in the system is assessed as part of ongoing learning and teaching, both periodically and at key transitions, with the first formal assessment for qualifications, including examinations taken

around the age of 15, and at the end of Senior Phase. Based on the annual assessment of achievement of CfE levels, 72% of P1, P4 and P7 learners (combined) achieved expected levels in literacy, and 79% in numeracy (Scottish Government, 2020, Evidence pack). In secondary education, 88% of S3 learners achieved the expected level in literacy and 90% in numeracy (Scottish Government, 2020, Evidence pack).

15-year-olds' level in global competences (PISA)

In PISA's new global competences module, Scotland ranked among the top-performing countries and scored higher (mean score of 534) than their expected outcomes based on its average results in reading, maths and science. Global competence aims to capture the capacity of 15 year olds to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. Scotland was the fourth top-performing country, behind Singapore, Canada, and Hong Kong (China), with mean performance scores more than 50 points above the overall average (overall average score = 474 points). While differences in average performance across countries and economies were large, the gap that separates the highest-performing and lowest-performing students within each country was even larger. Scotland was amongst the countries and economies whose variations in performance scores between students were the largest, along with Canada, Israel, Malta, and Singapore, exceeding 100 score points compared to an average of 91 points.

Scotland was the third country with the largest proportion of students who scored at Level 5 (12%), behind Singapore (22%) and Canada (15%). This is significantly higher than the average of 4% of students. At Level 5, the highest level of proficiency in global competence, students are able to analyse and understand multiple perspectives. They are able to examine and evaluate large amounts of information without much support provided in the unit's scenario. Students can effectively explain situations that require complex thinking and extrapolation and can build models of the situation described in the stimulus.

Equity

Students' socio-economic status has a relatively small impact on their performance in Scotland, compared to other OECD countries and economies. Student performance in PISA is related to socio-economic status but the data show that this relationship is not deterministic. The extent of socio-economic disparities in academic performance is an indication of whether an education system helps promote social mobility. As shown in the Figure below Scotland displayed above-average degree of equity in reading performance compared to other OECD countries in 2018, using the strength of the socio-economic gradient (measure of the predictive power of socio-economic status on students' performance). The socio-economic gradient in reading is weaker in Scotland (the ESCS explains only 8.6% of the variance) than on average (12%), in maths (7.9% compared to 13.8% on average) and in science (10.1% compared to 12.8% on average).

Figure 1.3. Equity and reading performance, PISA 2018

Equity measured by the strength of the socio-economic gradient
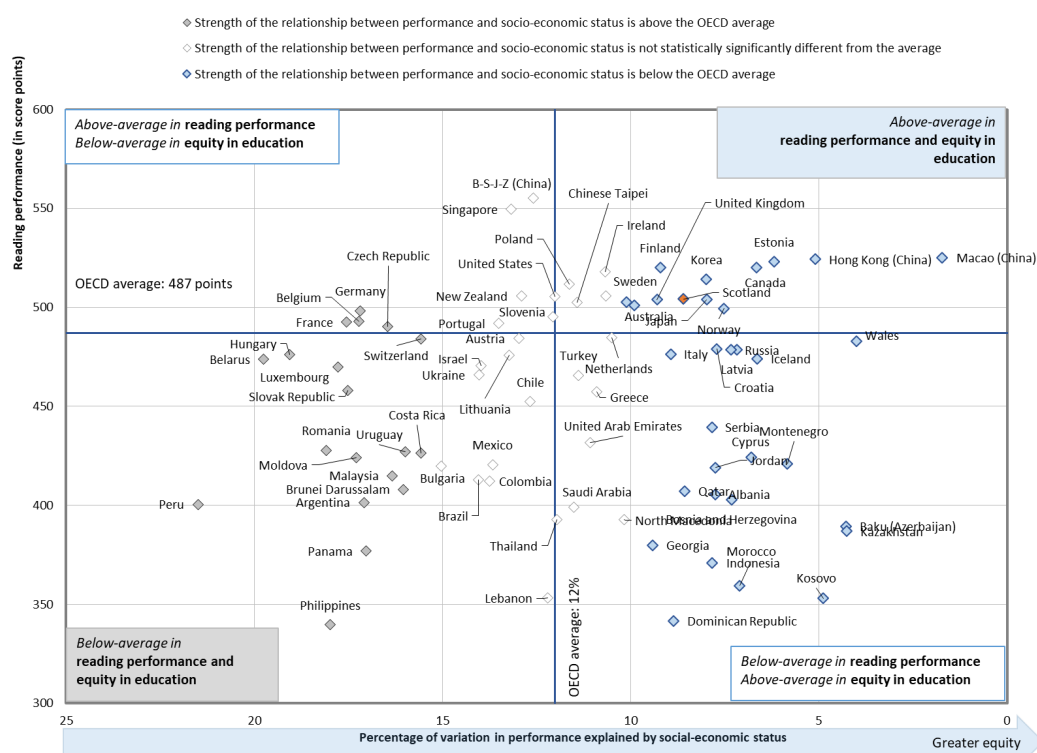
Source: OECD, 2019.

In 2018, the proportion of disadvantaged students who were academically resilient was higher in Scotland (13.9%) than on average across OECD countries and economies (11.3%) (PISA 2018 Vol II Table II.B2.5 and Table II.B1.3.1). This marks the overall progress made on academic resilience since 2012, both in Scotland and on average. The difference in performance is significant (32 score-points) between students at the top and bottom quarters of socio economic status in Scotland, although still below OECD average (37 score-points).

PISA 2018 data suggest that the variation around Scotland's mean reading score is largely explained by factors other than school characteristics. The average score-point variation in reading performance is largely due to within-school variation (84.8%, above the OECD average of 71%), and only a very small percentage is explained by between-school variations (8.1%, compared to 29% on average) (PISA 2018, Table II.B2.9 and Table II.B1.4.1).

On PISA's global competence module, the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged students' scores in global competence was larger than 80 score points in Scotland, was not significant after taking into account students' performance in reading, maths and science. The findings show that advantaged students (those in the top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) have access to more learning opportunities than disadvantaged students in Scotland as is the case in 31 of 64 participating countries and economies.

At the system level, Scotland uses three indicators to measure the attainment gap between the proportion of school students from the most and least deprived areas of Scotland:

- At SCQF Level 4 or better, 98.8 per cent of pupils from the least deprived areas attained 1 pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 92.1 per cent amongst those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 6.7 percentage points, up from 6.1 percentage points in 2017/18 and down from 11.3 percentage points in 2009/10 (the first year for which comparable statistics are available).
- At SCQF Level 5 or better, 94.6 per cent of pupils from the least deprived areas attained 1 pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 74.4 per cent amongst those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 20.2 percentage points, down very slightly from 20.3 percentage points in 2017/18 with attainment having decreased amongst pupils from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The attainment gap in 2009/10 was 33.3 percentage points.
- At SCQF Level 6 or better, 79.3 per cent of pupils from the least deprived areas attained 1 pass or more in 2018/19. This compared to 43.5 per cent amongst those from the most deprived areas. The attainment gap was therefore 35.8 percentage points, down from 37.4 percentage points in 2017/18 with attainment having decreased amongst pupils from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The attainment gap in 2009/10 was 45.6 percentage points.

Interestingly, learners in Scotland living in accessible rural areas are the most likely overall to achieve SCQF level 6 or better (62.8%); while learners in remote rural areas are the most likely to achieve at SCQF level 5 or better (87.9%) in 2018/2019, compared with other areas. The least likely to achieve those levels are learners in remote small town and urban areas classified as "other than large" (Scottish Government, 2020, Summary statistics for Attainment, Table 6).

School environment, health and well-being

Improving children and young people's health and well-being is one of the Scottish Government's key priorities. Students are more exposed to bullying in Scotland than on average across OECD countries and economies (index of 0.23 for a basis 0 on average), and a larger share of students are bullied frequently (11.4% compared to 7.8%) (PISA results 2018, Table III.B2.2.1 and Table III B1.2.1). The disciplinary climate in regular classes is similar in Scotland to the average climate across OECD countries and economies (index of 0.07). The large majority of students declare that situations that are unconducive to learning occur "never or hardly ever" or "in some lessons" only, including when students do not listen, when there is noise, or when students or teachers need to wait before class starts (PISA 2018 III Table III B2.3.1).

Competition between students seems to be slightly more common in Scotland than co-operation. In 2018, some 73% of students reported that it seemed to them that students were competing against each other ["very true" or "extremely true'], whereas 61% only said they observed co-operation among students. Students in Scotland also reported that their schoolmates seemed to value competition more than co-operation (PISA 2018 III Table III.B2.8.2). This was in opposition with the attitude across OECD countries and economies, where competition between students was on average less observed (50%) than co-operation (62%) (PISA 2018 III).

Students in Scotland report slightly lower life satisfaction compared to OECD average, and more prevalent fear of failure than average. The sense of belonging to one's school is slightly less strong in Scotland than on average across OECD countries and economies (PISA 2018 III and Table III B2.9.1). On a final, / note, students in Scotland display a growth mindset more often than on average across OECD countries and economies (PISA 2018 III).

Education policies

Curriculum for Excellence

The Curriculum for Excellence, introduced in schools in 2010, caters for children from age 3 to 18, with what is commonly known in Scotland as Broad General Education (early learning, primary and lower secondary levels) followed by the Senior Phase (three years of upper secondary education). The philosophy of CfE is that of a future-oriented education, aiming to help students develop into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (referred to as the four capacities).

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) defines curriculum as all the learning that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare; through school and beyond. Learning aims to be holistic and centred on the learner and students are expected to develop knowledge, skills and attributes together to think critically and adapt. The CfE framework encompasses four contexts for learning: eight curriculum areas grouping subjects, interdisciplinary learning, ethos and life of the school, and opportunities for personal achievements. CfE enables school communities to design their curriculum and teachers to teach in the way they see fit best their students' needs. The conception of teacher as curriculum developer was relatively new when first implemented in Scottish schools. Schools and local authorities were encouraged from the beginning to innovate and find local approaches to planning and delivering the curriculum within the framework provided centrally.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was a ground breaking curriculum policy when it first took shape in the early years 2000s. In 2000, the Education Act 2000 set the principles that education should be directed to the development of children's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, and that the children's views should be taken into account in decisions that significantly affect them. A National Debate concluded that one educational priority was to align curriculum to these aspirations, and the first statement of intent for a new Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was subsequently published in 2004. CfE was further shaped over the course of several years: a "Building the Curriculum" series developed the parameters of CfE in collaboration with national and local partners until 2010. Changes to the national regime of qualifications and discussions around student assessment approaches later aimed to align with CfE. A range of additional policies were developed including the creation of Education Scotland, and changes in the Inspectorate. Scotland spent almost a decade preparing its implementation by schools in 2010, when it was mainstreamed across the country.

In 2015, an OECD review of Scotland's education system concluded that CfE was a "watershed" moment for education in Scotland, widely supported and exemplified in some schools' inspiring curriculum experience, but required ongoing efforts to turn it into a reality for all students in the system. At the time, the OECD review acknowledged that the foundations of CfE had been set, including curriculum building blocks, assessments and qualifications, and adjustments to teacher education, leadership and the support structure. The consensus around CfE was deeply rooted and the teaching profession was progressively taking ownership. Challenges remained, however, including a lack of clarity in the nature of CfE (was it a curriculum, or a reform package?) and a risk of adopting a "wait and see" approach, that would hinder CfE and its development in schools. The review proposed a number of detailed recommendations. Those directly linked to CfE are summarised here, and the detail can be found in the full report (OECD, 2015[1]):

- To ensure equity and quality, develop metrics that do justice to the full range of CfE capacities informing a bold understanding of quality and equity;
- To strengthen decision-making and governance, i) create a new narrative for the Curriculum for Excellence; ii) Strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the "middle"; and iii) Simplify and clarify core guidance, including in the definitions of what constitutes the Curriculum for Excellence;

- To enhance schooling, teaching and leadership, focus on the quality of implementation of CfE in schools and communities, and make this an evaluation priority;
- To improve assessment and evaluation, strike a more even balance between the formative focus of assessment and developing a robust evidence base on learning outcomes and progression.

The Scottish Government received these recommendations, and used them as input into further policy development of CfE. The main actions taken as a result are summarised below, and analysed to a larger extent in Chapters 2-5:

- The guidance framework for the BGE curriculum was updated (including development of CfE Benchmarks and publication of a Statement for practitioners in 2016) and a "refreshed curriculum for excellence narrative" was published in 2019 as a response to the call for a new CfE narrative and simplified guidance;
- National oversight and management arrangements for the curriculum framework were adjusted in 2018/19 in an attempt for more collaborative and systemic implementation;
- The quality and equity of CfE implementation in schools was made the focus of sampled inspection, and a number of tools, action plans and strategies were developed to enhance CfE implementation, and to increase engagement in secondary schools.

Additional policy developments that go beyond the scope of CfE, but affect its environment, are reviewed in the following sections. With CfE having been in place for 15 years, this 2020 OECD review provides the opportunity for an external assessment of progress with its implementation in light of current experience and international evidence to adapt and update for the future.

Main education policies around CfE

Getting It Right for Every Child

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) was introduced in 2006. It provides a framework for all professionals working with children and youth to enforce children's rights and guarantee children's well-being holistically and across services. The Scottish Government decided in 2019 that the best way to promote and embed GIRFEC further was in partnership with local delivery partners, through practical help, guidance and support, and not on a statutory basis. The Scottish Government is therefore refreshing GIRFEC policy with those partners and developing new practice guidance on the key components of GIRFEC. Along with CfE and DYW, GIRFEC is a pillar of Scotland's commitment to inclusive education. GIRFEC policy has been undergoing some revisions since 2019 (new guidance), to allow for more partnership work between local delivery partners and the Scottish Government.

Early Childhood Care and Education

"Realising the Ambition: Being Me" was published February 2020 as an update of national practice guidance for the early childhood care and education (ECEC) sector (Building the Ambition, 2014 and Pre-birth to Three, 2010). The policy reflects CfE curriculum guidance for ECEC based on national and international research in early childhood. It provides pedagogy and practice guidance for practitioners working with young children, also in alignment with other policies (e.g. GIRFEC) (Education Scotland website https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/realising-the-ambition/).

Scottish Attainment Challenge

As part of the SNP's programme for government in 2016, the First Minister set her government the "mission" to close the attainment gap between learners living in poorer areas and those in middle-class areas. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was developed to this end in 2015, with GBP750 million to

support schools and local authorities improve levels of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in a way that would "close the gap". Following implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the Scottish Government provided some evidence of impact:

- the gaps between school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas achieving 1 pass or more at SCQF levels 3 or better, 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better have reduced between 2009/10 and 2017/18

- Attainment among the most disadvantaged children and young people rose in numeracy at all stages, and in reading and writing at P1, P4 and P7. The attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged has narrowed on most indicators.

- 88% of headteachers reported improvements in closing the poverty- related attainment gap as a result of interventions supported by the Attainment Scotland Fund and 95% expect to see improvements over the next 5 years.

Developing the Young Workforce

In 2014, Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (DYW) set out to reduce youth unemployment levels by 40% by 2021. The strategy aims to create a work relevant school based curriculum offer for young people in Scotland, informed by the needs of current and anticipated jobs market. This includes embedding career education from 3 to 18, offering formal careers advice at an earlier point in school, embedding employer engagement in education and creating new work based learning offers and widening learner pathway options for young people in their Senior Phase. New learner pathway options include a wider Apprenticeship offer for young people with Foundation Apprenticeships (SCQF Level 6) and Graduate Level Apprenticeships in place and levels 4 and 5 in development. Implementation of DYW required schools to include the strategy as part of their curriculum development, thus creating direct links with CfE. Funding commitments, which was originally allocated to schools through Education Scotland (2014-2016), was extended until 2025 and to include regional employer-led groups (Evidence pack).

Teacher policies

A review of teacher education published in 2011 (Donaldson 2011 TSF) concluded that the two most important and achievable ways in which school education can realise the high aspirations Scotland has for its young people are through supporting and strengthening the quality of teaching and leadership. The publication of Teaching Scotland's Future highlighted the importance of sustained teacher professional learning and development in improving outcomes for young people. It also emphasised the importance of career pathways in supporting teacher recruitment and retention. The review led to a wider recognition as to the importance of quality professional learning and good educational leadership, while providing a basis for Professional Update. It also reinforced the place of masters learning for teacher which is increasingly common at all levels of the profession. A wide range of new forms of Initial Teacher Education programmes also appeared in Scotland towards the end of the decade, aimed at helping to address recruitment challenges for teachers in priority subjects as well as in the remote and rural areas of Scotland. Work to develop teacher career pathway models was conducted from 2017 to 2020. It was delayed by the COVID-19 crisis and implementation originally scheduled for August 2021 might also be delayed (Evidence pack).

Leadership

The Scottish Government set a priority on developing teacher and school leadership in recent years, including the development of a broader offer of professional learning agenda and the new requirement for school leaders to hold the Standard for Headship, a new qualification. The mission to clarify and bring coherence to educational leadership in Scotland, previously held by the Scottish College for Education Leadership, were transferred to Education Scotland and its Professional Learning and Leadership

Directorate in 2018. Education Scotland started an evaluation process to inform developments of the professional learning offer and committed to collaborating with Regional Improvement Collaboratives, local authorities and the Learning Directorate in this endeavour (Evidence pack).

New national courses and revised national qualifications

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), in collaboration with stakeholders, designed new National Qualifications in the attempt to align them with CfE and to certify learners' achievement in developing the four capacities as well as the skills for learning, life and work. The new national courses and qualifications aim to provide high standards and a formal acknowledgement of learners' achievements, while ensuring at the same time a continuity with the breadth and depth of learning sought at earlier levels of CfE. The "new national courses" were first introduced in 2013/2014, then revised and implemented as the "revised national qualifications" in 2016/2017. Scottish National Qualifications – including National 2-5, Higher and Advanced Higher – are single-subject qualifications that certify the achievement of a level of knowledge and skills in a range of subjects. They are part of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which unifies all qualifications in Scotland and classifies them between its 12 levels (Evidence pack). The number of qualifications registered in the SCQF beyond those awarded by the SQA also grew as a result of the Scottish Government's promotion of the diversification of possible pathways and qualifications for learners.

Students need at least four Higher qualifications to enter universities, although the requirements can be stricter for more competitive degrees. Most universities and further education institutions do not require Avanced Higher qualifications in Scotland, but achieving that level in some subjects can reinforce a student's application. The national courses at Higher and Advanced Higher levels award qualifications at Level 6 and Level 7 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, respectively. In broad terms, higher qualifications are considered the Scottish equivalent to English A-Levels, but they are not identical. Some notable differences are that Scottish Highers are one-year courses whereas A-Levels take two years to complete; and students in Scotland get a smaller range of subjects to choose from at higher and advanced higher levels than in England for A-Levels. The number of UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service) points awarded by each grade also differ between the two types of qualifications, the A-Levels' grades A* and A corresponding to Scottish Advanced Higher Grades A and B, respectively (Table).

Table 1.3. Number of UCAS points awarded by qualifications, Scotland and England

	Scottish Higher	Scottish Advanced Higher	English A-Levels
Grade A*	Na	Na	56 points
Grade A	33 points	56 points	48 points
Grade B	27 points	48 points	40 points
Grade C	21 points	40 points	32 points
Grade D	15 points	32 points	24 points

Source: University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) website, https://www.ucas.com/ucas/tariff-calculator

The National Improvement Framework

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) was developed in 2016 with the ambition to "make Scotland 'the best place to grow up and learn'" and to complement the existing pillars of the Scottish education system: Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). The NIF aims to structure a system, collaborative approach to educational improvement, in pursuit of two key targets: achieving excellence through raising attainment and achieving equity by ensuring that all children have the same opportunity to succeed. The NIF sets out a holistic view

of the education system, bringing together evidence and information from all levels and on all aspects that impact performance. A new national data collection system provides additional information at school, local and national level about children's progress in literacy and numeracy, based on teachers' assessment of progress. To support teachers in making judgements, the government has introduced benchmarks for greater clarity on national standards as well as expanding opportunities for professional dialogue around standards through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives. In 2019, local authorities reported that teachers feel increasingly confident when assessing progress. From 2018, Scottish National Standardised Assessments provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence. These assessments occur in primary school (ages 5, 8 and 11) and lower secondary (age 14). Since 2016, attainment in the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels has been published annually to provide key data regarding children's literacy and numeracy progress (OECD 2019 EPO).

Tensions around CfE that impact student learning

This OECD assessment aims primarily to understand how CfE is implemented in BGE and the senior phase and to what extent it contributes to an education of quality for all young people in Scotland. As the scope of the assessment was agreed, a number of issues cutting across the Scottish education system were raised by the Scottish Parliament and Government, as well as by the OECD team (Figure). These issues arise from the need to find balance between many parameters in Scotland's complex education system and have implications for the way CfE is implemented in the current policy context. The issues are reviewed below as part of the broader context, and provide a useful backdrop for the analysis presented in the following chapters:

- Tensions found between local curriculum flexibility and guidance: by design, CfE enshrines the principle of local curriculum flexibility since it gives schools the autonomy to design their own curriculum to best respond to students' needs. At the same time, concerns arise in the public debate about whether the variability that inevitably characterises schools' curricula effectively provides excellent education for all learners, or if it might increase educational inequalities. Balance between flexibility and guidance also touches upon the issue of what level and kind of support schools might need to design curricula of high quality while respecting teachers' and school leaders' working time;

- Tensions in the understandings of breadth and depth of learning: opposed in the public debate, breadth and depth of learning seem not to have the same definition for the various stakeholders. There was a tendency to embody this opposition in the opposition between Broad General Education and Senior Phase, but the lack of clarity around the concepts poses many question. For instance: does breadth refer to the number of class subjects taken by students, and depth to the time allocated to each; or do they both refer to specific pedagogical approaches; are they exclusive or can they be complementary, and many more;

- Tensions in the conceptualisation of knowledge, skills and competencies: the public debate in Scotland tends to oppose knowledge and skills, as if learning for the 21st century was possible without using and developing both. The OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 project describes the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (integrations referred to as "competencies") that enables students to perform in ill-defined environments, thus allowing them to navigate a fast-paced and uncertain world (Wesselink et al., 2010[37]; Mulder, 2001; OECD, 2018). The definition of competencies as integrative and with a broad performance orientation allows the debate to shift away from the traditional "knowledge v. skills" focus, by acknowledging the importance of both in learning;

- Tension between curriculum, student assessment and evaluation: there is an apparent (mis)alignment between curriculum, assessment and evaluation policies especially at the Senior

Phase. These policies have complex relationships across numerous education systems, requiring alignment in their design as well as their implementation (OECD 2013; OECD 2020; OECD E2030);

- Tension between levels of decision making and operations in education: via the principle of local curriculum flexibility, CfE committed to school empowerment in a system already characterised by strong policy leadership from the centre and assertive local governments. The definition of a clear distribution of responsibilities which all stakeholders can agree to and take on is a constant policy priority for curriculum as well as other policies;

Some of these tensions likely arose throughout the developments of CfE, due to a combination of the ambition of the policy and the principle of flexibility embedded in CfE. Yet, some of these are inherent in the design of CfE itself, as it allows for flexibility in the interpretation of the principles and actions to take to make CfE happen in the ground across Scotland.

These tensions may affect the learning experiences of students across the country. Their learning experiences may vary in terms of the curriculum, as teachers have great freedom and may be overloaded in terms of course choices in some places with much less offer in other regions; when they move up to Senior Phase they have different types of assessments in relation to the types of learning they are experiencing in Broad General Education (BGE); they may have challenges to in finding the right balance in their development of knowledge and competencies. To resolve them, it is necessary for Scotland to pinpoint where it wants to be on each of these, for CfE to reach its full potential and allow Scottish education to offer an education of excellence to all its learners.

Figure 1.4. Underlying tensions in curriculum implementation
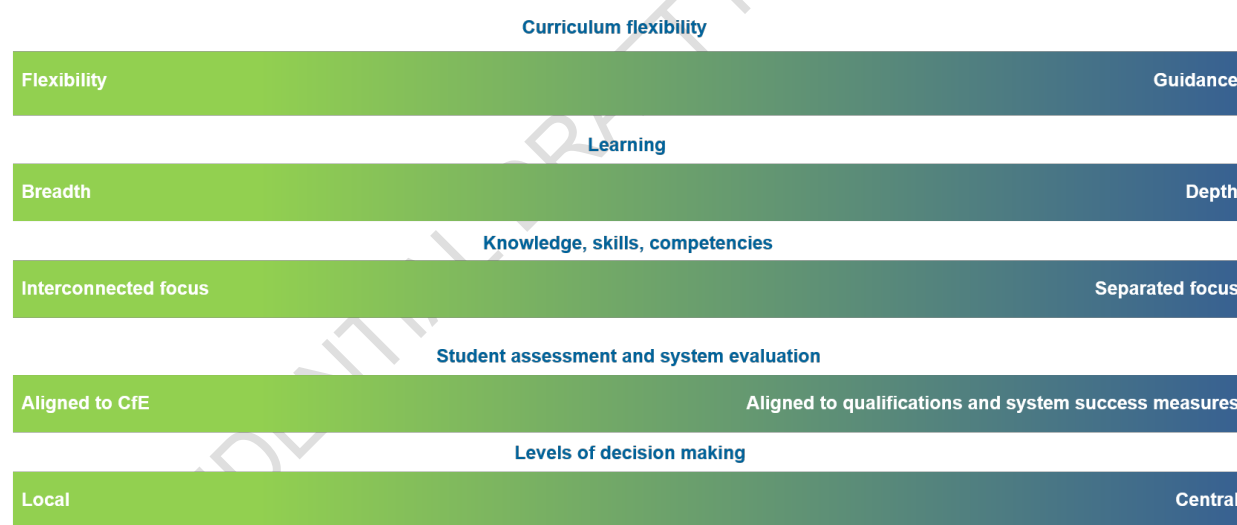
Source: developed by the OECD team

Conclusion: reviewing the implementation of CfE from a student learning perspective

CfE is at a key moment. The economic situation, the impact of COVID on the society, economy and education, the variable progress made in different education outcomes indicators, together with 10 year experience in schools provide a good opportunity to review how CfE was implemented and what can be done for it to continue to deliver quality learning for all students across Scotland to be ready for their future.

Education system performance in Scotland presents a variable picture: while PISA results have increased in reading, they have been declining in math and sciences. At the same time, Scottish students have been among the top performers in global competences, which measure their capacity to interpret worldviews, to engage effectively in interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. In addition, there has been an increase to 95% in the positive destinations of those leaving schools (considered in Scotland in relation to higher and further education, employment and other positive destinations).

In terms of equity, there has been an apparent improvement for disadvantaged students: according to PISA, the impact of SES in performance is among the lowest across OECD, while there is a higher proportion of resilient students (students from disadvantaged backgrounds who perform at high levels). Scottish data shows an improvement in the performance of disadvantaged students in SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, with lower performance for those living in small towns in relation to rural areas.

Student wellbeing at age 15 shows a mixed picture, with higher levels than OECD average in bullying, in competition and in anxiety and lower student wellbeing. At the same time, students report they experience higher than average growth mindset. It is important to point that students at age 16 take their national exams, which are high stakes in terms of their next educational steps.

To achieve these outcomes, the system is organised around its mostly public provision of education from 3 to 18 years-olds, with ECEC, primary, secondary and upper secondary education (senior phase) provided in academic and more vocational tracks with a range of choice for students within their own pathways and offer by colleges, which can be combined. Teachers appear high quality in terms of requirements for entry into the profession and availability of support and professional development. School leaders have new supports in place to exercise their role.

Students are engaged in learning through Curriculum for Excellence, which was introduced in schools from 2010. CfE aims to provide a holistic approach to learning, to develop knowledge, skills and attributes together to think critically and adapt to the future. To support CfE and the education system, the government has introduced a range of policies and strategies for schools, for education professionals, and to drive system performance to higher levels.

After ten years since its first implementation across schools, a range of issues and tensions have become apparent, highlighted by the Scottish Parliament and Government, and other education stakeholders. Indeed, policies need constant revision and adjustment, and this ten-year timeline is an opportunity to review CfE and its implementation from a student perspective: how students' progress through the system, especially in the transition from lower secondary into senior phase with CfE.

The ambitions of CfE are to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. With 10 years of practice in schools, who have agency at the local and school level to shape the curriculum: how do students live the CfE and their learning as they progress through the system? The analysis undertaken in this report reflects on how CfE has and can deliver the best possible learning experience to prepare students for their future by looking at CfE and its change approach. To respond, the following chapters reflect on the following:

- How has CfE been implemented from a student perspective? Is the CfE design working well for all students as they progress and transition through the system?
- How have those shaping CfE been involved and how can they engage most productively to continue delivering the best possible CfE?
- How has the policy environment contributed to CfE reaching all schools consistently?
- Has there been a clear and well-structured implementation strategy from its inception?

References

OECD (2015), *Improving schools in Scotland: an OECD perspective*, OECD Publishing, http://www.oecd.org/education/school/Improving-Schools-in-Scotland-An-OECD-Perspective.pdf.   [1]

2 Curriculum for Excellence design and implementation

This chapter analyses the design of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence and how it has been implemented since its inception in 2000 to understand progress made and potential gaps between the original intent and actual practice. The chapter starts with a description of CfE, follows with a review of its vision, its policy development in relation to student learning and progression from primary through to secondary education and senior phase and its assessment, the resources invested, and concludes with a summary of issues for consideration.

Introduction

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was a highly remarkable curriculum initiative in the early 2000s and it remains an inspiring curriculum policy in theory and in actual practice in schools. Its vision offers the rationale for rethinking curriculum intentions and for shifting emphasis in teaching and learning towards a more holistic approach that encompasses knowledge, skills and values agreed by the Scottish society. Since its inception in 2000, CfE has made progress in theory and in practice, as it reached schools in 2010. The first cohorts of students having fully gone through school with CfE completed recently.

After 20 years since its inception, it is possible to reflect on progress made from policy to actual practice following its implementation across schools from 2010 onwards. It is challenging to know whether the process has resulted in all students having accomplished all the objectives of CfE in a period of ten years. Not only because policy as designed does not necessarily translate into literal enactment, as those involved interpret and enact if differently, and this is already one of the objectives of CfE, but also because there have been challenges in elaborating the ideas in coherent programmes and materials, and difficulties in enacting them fully in real school and classroom practices nationwide. In addition, the metrics to understand its accomplishments remain elusive. To understand progress made requires the analysis of the curriculum as well as the process it has followed for its implementation.

'Curriculum' is an elusive concept, with dozens of interpretations in literature (Jackson, 1992). Essentially, curriculum can be seen as a 'plan or design for learning', with many possible representations and at many levels of education (van den Akker, 2003). Our analysis of the interplay between the intended and implemented curriculum will focus on the perceptions and experiences of the learners (as ultimate audience of the curriculum), with often immediate connections to the roles of teachers as main curriculum actors.

From a policy perspective, at the other end of the spectrum, curriculum development is a highly dynamic enterprise, driven by numerous ideological considerations, interests and expectations of many groups (Viennet and Pont, 2017; Gouedard et al., 2020). Consequently, many actors and factors influence the processes and results of curriculum change, to be noticed in school organizations, classroom realities and student experiences and outcomes (Fullan, 2008). Many of such dynamic forces are addressed in chapters 3 and 4. This chapter analyses how elements of policy design have played out in the implementation of CfE and what can be done in the future to enhance these.

The findings are structured along three levers of the OECD framework on successful implementation policies (as introduced in Chapter 1): the policy is driven by a vision, offers coherent policy tools, and is adequately resourced to be sustainable.

An overview of the CfE and its components

The Curriculum for Excellence, caters for children from age 3 to 18. Early learning, primary and lower secondary levels are grouped under "Broad General Education", while the "Senior Phase" aims to cover the three years of upper secondary education. . Following much work in its development, its was implemented across schools in Scotland from 2010 onwards. As an overarching description of CfE and its development has been provided in Chapter 1, this section describes the different components that shape CfE for schools and teachers at present. The vision for Curriculum for Excellence (as formulated in 2004) has been visualized in the compact figure below, with four 'fundamental capacities' that represent the essential purposes of Scottish education

Figure 2.1. The four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence

Source: Scottish Government (2019) Refreshed Curriculum for Excellence narrative

In September 2019, following the OECD 2015 review recommendation to 'create a new narrative for CfE', a refreshed narrative for Scotland's curriculum positioned CfE in the current context, explaining that Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence helps children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. The four fundamental capacities remain at its centre, enabling all young people to become: successful learners; confident individuals; effective contributors; and responsible citizens. These capacities are seen as:

- reflecting and recognizing the lifelong nature of education and learning
- recognizing the need for all children and young people to know themselves as individuals and to develop their relationships with others, in families and in communities;
- recognizing the knowledge, skills and attributes that children and young people need to acquire to thrive in our interconnected, digital and rapidly changing world;
- enabling children and young people to be democratic citizens and active shapers of that world.

Besides aiming at 'excellence', the word "ALL" (children and young persons) in the vision underlines that CfE also explicitly aims at equity. This dual focus is, no doubt, admirable, but, as we shall see later, not without challenges.

The four capacities are further explained by specifying the respective 'attributes' and 'capabilities' below.

Figure 2.2. Attributes and capabilities of the four capacities

successful learners	confident individuals	responsible citizens	effective contributors
attributes	**attributes**	**attributes**	**attributes**
• enthusiasm and motivation for learning • determination to reach high standards of achievement • openness to new thinking and ideas	• self-respect • a sense of physical, mental and emotional well-being • secure values and beliefs • ambition	• respect for others • commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life	• an enterprising attitude • resilience • self-reliance
capabilities	**capabilities**	**capabilities**	**capabilities**
• use literacy, communication and numeracy skills • use technology for learning • think creatively and independently • learn independently and as part of a group • make reasoned evaluations • link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations.	• relate to others and manage themselves • pursue a healthy and active lifestyle • be self-aware • develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world • live as independently as they can • assess risk and make informed decisions • achieve success in different areas of activity.	• develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it • understand different beliefs and cultures • make informed choices and decisions • evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues • develop informed, ethical views of complex issues.	• communicate in different ways and in different settings • work in partnership and in teams • take the initiative and lead • apply critical thinking in new contexts • create and develop • solve problems

In CfE definitions, curriculum is a wide concept: the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond. CfE covers the whole schooling route from age 3-18 year and ultimately aims at 'positive and sustained destinations' (in higher and vocational education, in the world of work and in personal life) after the schooling years. CfE puts the learner explicitly at the center of the curriculum and it refers to four (rather diverse) contexts for planning and learner experiences: the ethos and life of the school as a community; opportunities for personal achievement; interdisciplinary learning and curriculum areas and subjects. In the CfE philosophy, schools and teachers are considered and empowered to make the decisions needed to provide a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and which reflects the uniqueness of their communities. This suggests an approach that gives wide autonomy for schools and their teachers in curriculum making.

Another way of summarizing the intentions of CfE (as stated in policy documents is that children and young people's rights and entitlements are central to Scotland's curriculum and every child and young person is entitled to experience:

- a curriculum which is coherent from 3 to 18
- a broad general education, including well planned experiences and outcomes across all the curriculum areas from early years through to S3
- a Senior Phase after S3, which provides opportunities to attain and achieve, including to study for qualifications, awards and other planned activities to develop the four capacities

- opportunities for developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, with continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing
- opportunities to maximize their individual potential, benefitting from appropriate personal support and challenge
- support to help them move into positive and sustained destinations beyond school.

In terms of the content of learning, within the overall framework, 'Experiences' and 'Outcomes' describe the expectations for learning and progression in all areas of the curriculum. It is the responsibility of schools and their partners to bring those experiences and outcomes together and apply the national entitlements to produce programs for learning across a broad curriculum, covering:

- Science
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Social studies
- Expressive arts
- Health and wellbeing
- Religious and moral education
- Technology.

In addition, throughout this broad curriculum, it is expected there will be an emphasis on the Scottish context, culture and history and its place in the world.

According to CfE, this planning should demonstrate the following principles for curriculum design:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalization and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance.

The Curriculum for Excellence framework intends to allow for both professional autonomy and responsibility when planning and delivering the curriculum. For example, there are no longer specific input requirements in terms of time allocations. The framework provides flexibility to organize, schedule and deliver the experiences and outcomes in ways that meet the needs of all learners, but also provides reassurance about consistency where necessary. Such flexibility will result in a more varied pattern of curriculum structures and arrangements to reflect local needs and circumstances.

CfE vision as a driving force

The vision around the four fundamental capacities is widely appreciated (not only in Scotland but also internationally) for its bold, aspirational, value-driven and future-oriented approach, as compared to (more) traditional or conventional curriculum thinking in policy making and school practices. The vision was appealing from the start, with broad support for values and principles across seemingly all stakeholders, experts and practitioners. The consensual approach to educational decision making in Scotland has helped in creating this wide support. Also, in the political arena there is hardly disagreement about the overall

vision. Although over the years some cracks in the appreciation for CfE seem to have emerged, the wide support for the vision is still present, as we read in many reports and heard in all our conversations.

As said, the CfE vision is also recognized and has been trendsetting in international curriculum discourses. It has served as a widely cited example, confirming its major principles, and even for its compact visualisation of the four capacities. The basic ideas are still remarkably valid (after almost two decades after inception) and they still adequately reflect the four broad aims that are nowadays internationally seen as relevant for learning and teaching in education. The OECD has defined a learning compass 2030 that introduces the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that learners need to fulfil their potential and contribute to the well-being of their communities and the planet. In the analysis it undertakes of curriculum, it refers to Scotland CfE widely (OECD, 2020). Next to more traditional (academic) knowledge aims, there is more attention to competencies that prepare for life, for personal development, and for the world of work (with appreciated options for vocational directions and apprenticeships).

CfE appears to be incorporated in the hearts and minds of almost all people in many roles across the whole education spectrum as an appealing ideal. That is in itself quite an accomplishment, as beliefs are usually the most difficult to be influenced part of curriculum change (Cuban 1992; Fullan, 2008), compared to two other important dimensions of teacher change: in use of materials and in instructional behaviour. However, there are still traces of some 'traditional' beliefs (e.g., the preference for very broad programmes in terms of many separate subjects) that hinder implementation in term of programmatic and organizational changes. Moreover, expressing agreement with the vision of CfE does not imply automatically that behavioural changes, notably in pedagogy and assessment are in line with the intentions (see next section).

Many conversation partners and other commenters expressed a tension between the ideals of excellence and equity, as reflected in CfE and the overall policy ambitions. In particular, this regards the discrepancy between the intended broad aims for learning for all learners during most time of their schooling and the high policy ambitions of closing the achievement gap (with a narrower focus on numeracy and literacy) between students from different backgrounds. Also, the seemingly dominant emphasis on preparing for exams in secondary education does not seem to contribute to balance the vision set in CfE and the practice, as those exams (and the underlying qualifications) seem only a limited representation of the broad capacities (see more in next section). For instance, the OECD team heard repeated calls from both learners and parents for stronger emphasis on preparation for life and work than thus far realised in many current school practices.

The refreshed narrative for CfE (Scottish Government, 2019) seems to have limited impact at this point, according to discussions with practitioners across Scotland. This may be because it may not have addressed perceived ambiguities in the overall education mission or because for many people it might have received little attention in the continuous stream of many policy documents.

Overall, the OECD team considers that it seems wise to maintain the core message of the CfE vision, given its collective development and its widespread support. However, while the ideas in paper and policy are clear, during the OECD team visits and in a range of research and analysis of CfE, there appears to be a distance between the intentions and the diverse emphases and interpretations by different stakeholders and in different practices of CfE across Scotland. While this is partly the intention of CfE in terms of autonomy for its implementation, it might be wise to take a fresh, critical and creative look at the vision again in light of almost two decades of many (societal, scientific, health, political, technological) changes at national and global scale. Reviewing what those relatively abstract statements mean and imply for choices in the curriculum can be a valid exercise to consolidate next steps.

Focusing on the vision from a student learning from 3 to 18 perspective, the vision seems to be consolidated in broad general education for students up to 15, but appears less so in the senior phase of secondary education. In this level of education, most observers and those the OECD team interviewed highlighted a gap in practice in terms of CfE aspirations and actual focus on student learning. This may be

because implementation of that last stage of the 3-18 trajectory started later than for BGE, from 2014 and has had less time to consolidate, but it may also show different tensions, including a mismatch between external assessments and CfE expectations, different aspirations related to cultural values and traditions and discrepancies with the overall curriculum philosophy. Closing this gap between the vision and the practice in Senior Phase will be at the heart of success in the future development of CfE.

Coherence of Curriculum for Excellence components

Curriculum for Excellence was developed following a National Debate in the early 2000s. The first statement of intent was published in 2004 followed by the 'Building the Curriculum' series until 2010. These documents, developed in collaboration with national and local partners, set out the broad parameters of CfE, with schools and Local Authorities encouraged to innovate and find local approaches to planning and delivering the curriculum. "Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching" (2008) is seen as a key document in the series. It sets out the curriculum levels, the eight curriculum areas and principles for curriculum design. "Experiences and Outcomes" (often called Es+Os) followed, setting out clear and concise statements about children's learning and progression in each curriculum area set across five curriculum levels. "Benchmarks" were developed over 2016/17, complementing the experiences and outcomes and trying to clarify what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels. They also provide support for consistency in teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgements when it comes to assessing the achievement of a level.

As the curriculum was being implemented a range of guidance and support materials was generated at both national and local level. This led, over time, to a perception of overload by practitioners reported to the OECD team, and in August 2016 a definitive "Statement for Practitioners" from HM Chief Inspector of Education was published. The statement acknowledged that there was too much support material and guidance for practitioners at both national and local level which was contributing to the growth of over-bureaucratic approaches to planning and assessment in many schools and classrooms across the country. The statement was intended to provide clear, practical advice for teachers and practitioners on planning of learning, teaching and assessment across the curriculum. It provided key messages about what teachers and practitioners were expected to do to effectively for all learners, and also suggested what should be avoided. It summarized the key components of the curriculum framework within which teachers and practitioners were expected to teach. Action was taken at national level to significantly streamline all support and guidance materials for the curriculum.

The OECD team recognises that a lot of effort, resources and engagement have been invested to further develop CfE after its initial design. This continued policy attention and dedication is impressive, but an unintended consequence is that the resulting design (structure and messages) of many subsequent curriculum-related documents, tools and instruments have become rather complex. The evolving program seems overloaded with numerous elements: the vision around its four capacities (with attributes and capabilities); seven principles; eight curriculum areas; curriculum entitlements; qualifications; expectations and outcomes; benchmarks; moderations; progression levels; and more. Although most of those efforts were aiming at offering more clarity (often in response to concerns and questions of practitioners), taken together, this somewhat overwhelming image has elicited some critical labels such as a 'cluttered', 'over-accessorized' or 'Christmas-tree' curriculum, including specific jargon that may not necessarily be appreciated.

The amount of ongoing policy and support documents also seems to be somewhat in contrast with the espoused autonomy and flexibility for school leaders and teachers to be the major agents for change themselves. One might even see this reflected in the frequent policy vocabulary about "delivery", giving the impression to practitioners that they have the obligation to hand over the curriculum (as a 'package'

from the above/outside world) to their learners. A related threat to the espoused spirit of (relative) autonomy is the strong assessment pressure underlining that teachers are held accountable for correct delivery.

The inherent CfE complexity makes it not only hard to grasp in its totality for foreign outsiders (as our OECD team), but we noticed that it also reduces the clarity and consistency for practitioners, hampering actionable curriculum making 'on the ground'. Moreover, while the CfE policy also includes the intention to stimulate decentral flexibility for local curriculum making that flexibility is at risk as the multitude of measures and documents give inevitably an impression of a strong output regulation with high prescription.

A possible way of unravelling the complexity of CfE is to analyse its various components. Traditionally, curriculum is primarily associated with the aims, content and organization of learning (Walker, 1990), but various authors (Klein, 1991; van den Akker, 2003) have expanded this list of components to present a more comprehensive image of the curriculum, include: vision or rationale, goals and objectives, contents, materials and resources, learning activities, teaching strategies, assessment, grouping, time, and location. Especially when trying to redesign a curriculum and making it work in practice, it is wise to pay attention to the coherence of those components. The (normative) vision on the overarching, broader aims of learning and teaching serves as a central link, providing glue and connecting all other curriculum components. A metaphor to illustrate this viewpoint is a spider web (van den Akker, 2003; Thijs and van den Akker, 2009; see Figure 1), including guiding questions for the many curriculum components. The curricular spider's web points to both the flexibility and the vulnerability of curriculum, as every chain is as strong as its weakest element while all components are interrelated and interconnected.

Figure 2.3. The Curricular Spider Web
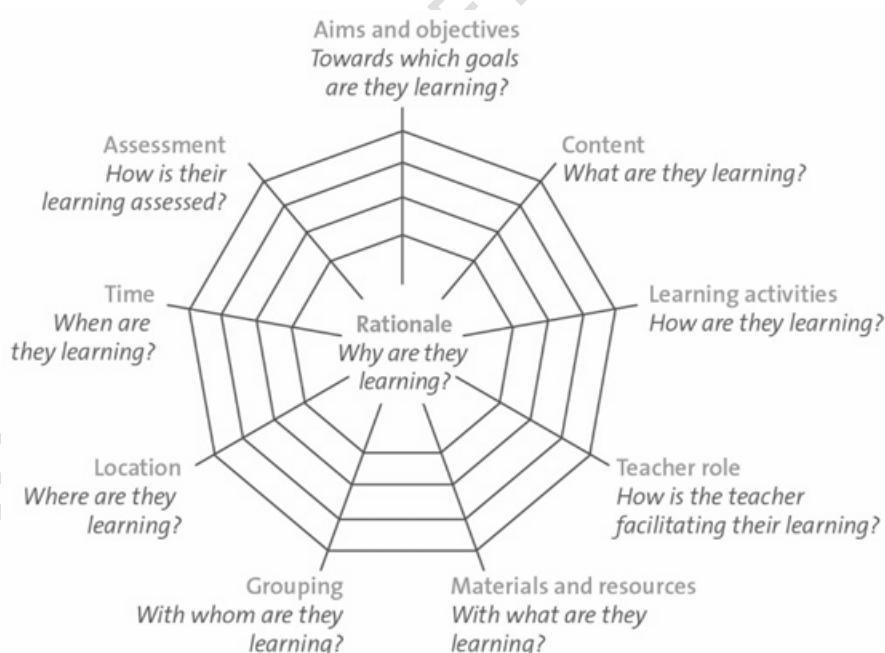
Source: Thijs and van den Akker (2009); Van den Akker (2003)

Besides a visual representation of the challenging components, the curricular spider web can serve as an analytic tool to explore and clarify the discrepancies between the existing and desired curriculum as well as a design tool that assists developers (including teachers) in prioritizing next steps in the process of getting to a coherent curriculum. Below, we present impressions about the various components of CfE

according to the spider web, with special attention on perceived gaps between implementation of the intended curriculum in school and actual classroom practices.

The findings build on interviews with Scottish pupils, young people, parents, school practitioners, and other stakeholders, findings from research publications, and it is noteworthy that, although there is quite a lot of (mostly) quantitative data collected on Scottish education. However, there is only limited systematic information available about what actually occurs in classroom practices. The vast zone between the (officially) intended and the attained curriculum looks more like a grey box. There is selected evidence available: The evidence pack provided by the Scottish government to the OECD team included a set of case studies of schools who have implemented CfE (Scottish Government, 2020). The OECD team collected anecdotal evidence from parents participating in interviews who considered that their children had developed a range of knowledge and skills that embody CfE, such as analytical skills and international and social awareness or strong team work. But there is lack of consolidated evidence of CfE practices in schools which can hamper a more precise and evidence-informed diagnosis of the curriculum in action. The next sections analyse CfE's building blocks using the various components of the curriculum spider's web.

Goals

In BGE the stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team and broader documentation suggest that goals seem to be in line with the broad vision, but in secondary education, the more restricted exams on the much less adapted qualifications create limitations and even obstacles to this alignment. Large efforts have been made to address the need for clarification guidance of teachers through "Expectations and Outcomes" documents, but questions are raised about their relevance, practicality and effectiveness. Moreover, we notice some doubts about the "National Improvement Framework" (NIF): is it clarifying the curriculum policy intentions or actually narrowing its priorities? For example: how does the NIF emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy relate to the aspirations about health and wellbeing, to other broad domains, and to employability? The "Benchmarks" also raise some ambiguous reactions, from the OECD exchanges: they create teacher work on moderation (which in itself may benefit professional dialogue), but perhaps they lead to diverted tendencies, such as for example, labelling students instead of monitoring and stimulating continuous learning. A related risk of the emphasis on benchmarks is an over-emphasis on what can be measured, resulting in performative school cultures (Livingstone and Doherty, 2020). The OECD team noticed a strong usage of performative language such as standards, benchmarks, attainment targets or score cards.

There is a gap in the relation between the overall curriculum goals and the qualifications for the senior phase. These qualifications can also be considered as statements about the specific goals of learning, but their emphasis is seen as deviating from the overall curriculum philosophy and aims, whilst CfE is officially portrayed as a curriculum for 3-18. That discrepancy is not only obscuring the clarity of the SP curriculum spirit, but it also appears to have strong backwash effects to BGE practices.

Contents

Learning in CfE aims to be holistic and centred on the learner, as emphasised by the four fundamental capacities. Students are expected to develop knowledge, skills and attributes together to think critically and adapt. The CfE framework encompasses four contexts for learning: curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning, ethos and life of the school, opportunities for personal achievements. To help them do so, learning is structured around three interdisciplinary areas (literacy, numeracy and health and well-being) and eight curriculum areas: Expressive arts; Languages; Religious and moral education; Social studies; Mathematics; Sciences; Technologies; Health and well-being. Some of these curriculum areas are priorities of the Scottish Government and receive dedicated funding.

Additional supports have been introduced to improve specific curriculum areas. Literacy and numeracy are two priorities set out in the CfE (Responsibility for all), the National Improvement Framework's vision (Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy), and the Improvement Plan. Scottish Authorities' approach to support literacy is built on the Literacy Action Plan (2010), which informs a range of government funded programmes (Scottish Government, 2020). Scottish Authorities follow and implement recommendations from the Making Maths Count report (2016) to tackle the priorities for numeracy and maths education (Evidence pack).

The STEM Education and Training Strategy for Scotland, published in 2017, provides an ambitious and targeted five-year programme of actions between 2017 and 2022 to encourage and support everyone to develop their STEM capability and skills under the themes of Excellence, Equity, Inspiration and Connection. It covers action in early years and school education, community learning, colleges, universities, apprenticeships and science centres and festivals, and sets out Scottish Minister's vision of a Scotland where everyone is encouraged and supported to develop their STEM skills throughout their lives to:

- Improve opportunities for all;
- Meet employer skills requirements;
- Drive inclusive economic growth; and
- Allow Scotland to flourish and compete on a global platform.

The STEM Strategy aims to pull together and enhance the wealth of existing activity across Scottish education as well as deliver new initiatives to achieve these aims. In schools, this includes supporting professional learning to increase teacher confidence in delivering STEM, implementation of the Young STEM Leaders programme, development of a STEM Nation Award to recognise excellence in schools delivering STEM, collation of an online directory of inspirational resources for schools, and expansion of the Improving Gender Balance Programme to tackle unconscious bias and gender stereotyping. Progress against this activity is being reported on an annual basis, including data on key performance indicators (Evidence pack).

The health and well-being of children, young people, and other members of educational communities is another priority for Scottish Authorities. The approach is designed to help children and young people develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities to build emotional and physical well-being and resilience. The CfE has a central role to play in promoting it, with a dedicated curriculum area and set of Experiences and Outcomes. The approach is also based on a shared responsibility across education levels to make children and young people feel nurtured, safe, respected and included in the learning environment.

The area of social studies aims to help learners understand their own country, the history and heritage of Scotland and the challenges it faces. Specific actions to support social studies involves granting funds to external "delivery partners" who work with schools to provide activities in this learning area, bring external speakers to talk to learners, and organised school trips. Support is also provided to specific themes such as Holocaust education, heritage education and social enterprise in schools.

Language education includes specific actions to preserve the Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic ("Scots") languages, support British Sign Language, and develop further learning of all languages from Primary 1 onwards. The 1+2 languages policy aims to enable all learners to study three languages by their third year of education, which has required additional support and funding to guarantee a diverse offer at school level since 2013 (Evidence pack).

In general, the OECD team observed and learned from its interviews with school-level actors that the diversity and holistic approach to learning is consistently adopted in primary schools. The approach seems also followed in most secondary schools in the first two years (S1 and S2), although it was often described as challenging by teachers, school leaders and learners. One of the most salient reasons highlighted for such a challenge was the seeming misalignment between the content and learning framework of CfE and

the requirements prescribed in national courses for qualifications taken in secondary education. Learning in the Senior Phase was described as being aligned to national course prescriptions, to best prepare students for their important exams required to complete education and move onto next stages, which do not follow the same structure and principles as CfE (see Chapter 4). As a result, the contents of learning as designed in CfE are not necessarily a full reality in secondary schools.

The first three years of secondary education (S1-3) appear to be increasingly influenced by the need to prepare for the Senior Phase, with less emphasis now being placed on designing a curriculum to meet the needs of young people of that age as envisaged by CfE. This particular issue is a consequence of both unresolved design issues within CfE and some external policies and policy omissions due to structural tensions described in Chapter 1. Of concern to the OECD team were observations those working in schools made about the purpose and focus of S2 in particular, a legacy of a 5-14 structure that predated CfE, but continues to shape its delivery and the experience of learners. Research conducted in the Republic of Ireland found that the second year of the secondary phase has particular importance for the future engagement and retention of students in the school system; students in that longitudinal study who were not engaged by their second year experience, did not re-engage in later years (Smith, Dunne and Darmody, 2006[12]).

The lack of alignment of these secondary education years to CfE is seen as historic and structural; the reforms needed in the secondary sector to support the implementation of CfE did not evolve alongside CfE implementation. In view of the historically valued preference for a broad curriculum offering in Scottish education and its objective as part of CfE, there are debates around the number of subjects to be chosen by students. In senior phase, the number seems to decrease from around 15 (sometimes even more) in S1 and S2, to about 12 in S3 to about 7 in S4 and 4 in S6. While the high numbers in BGE might result in fragmentation and superficiality (with few hours available for each subject per week), the number of subjects in senior phase are seen by some as too low, as they are narrowing a broad education, limiting choice to students and offering insufficient preparation especially for higher education. Others are of the opinion that the importance of broad choice is perhaps over-emphasized, once more as it may create tensions with the desired deeper understanding of knowledge.

More reflection seems desirable on the actual degree and nature of student choice. Different pathways have developed, but in discussions with education stakeholders, the focus on academic preparation in traditional subjects seems predominant. The strong focus on the number of subjects in comparison to the modest attention to the actual quality (relevance, consistency, practicality, effectiveness) of teaching and learning is an issues. This is also illustrated in policy debates. See the report of the same parliamentary committee on this issue:

> *However, in the course of the Education & Skills Committee Inquiry, and in recent parliamentary debates on Curriculum for Excellence, we heard from a number of people expressing the view that learners in all schools should follow a similar number of courses each year, particularly in S4 and that there should be greater prescription on a core set of subjects in the curriculum.*

This consideration of prescribing the same number of subjects for all students, regardless of their preferences for post-secondary routes and destinations, may not necessarily be optimal. It seems not in line with some of the espoused policy intentions mentioned above or in relation to quality. In that sense we share the remarks of the parliamentary committee:

> *At the same time, in their recent (June 2020) report on "Secondary Inspection findings: Secondary Curriculum 2016-2019", appended at Annex B, Education Scotland Inspectors note that "increasingly, secondary staff indicate that the focus of professional debate needs to be less about the number of subjects/course and more about how to deliver the Senior Phase entitlement in creative ways. These need to meet the range of young people's needs and develop their skills, attributes and capabilities as well as opportunities to attain qualifications that support positive destinations taking account of the school's unique context".*

Inspectors also note that "the extent to which the curriculum offered leads to positive outcomes for young people depends on a number of factors; it is not just about the number of subjects offered in any one year in the Senior Phase. Some of these factors which contribute to ensuring young people attain and achieve the best they possible can, are:

the quality of leadership of change

the curriculum as experienced by young people in their day-to-day learning, 'the

enacted curriculum', which can be linked to the quality of learning and teaching

the effectiveness of the BGE in supporting progression to the Senior Phase

the range and quality of learning pathways provided which best meets the needs of

learners within the school."

The issue of subject choice was initially considered as an example of local flexibility delivering between school variations that may have unforeseen consequences for learner progression given the historical importance of subject choice in Scotland. There seems to be an issue about the real choice options that students have, given the variation between schools, depending on context, capacity and resources (Shapira and Priestley, 2019), which touches equity concerns. Of note in discussions between the OECD team and stakeholders, were some observations about the constraints placed on schools by some local authorities in curriculum organisation.

But this focus on subject choice, and the failure to address the problems associated with it has also had implications for how the CfE commitment to a 'broad curriculum' translates at school level. Breadth is one of the design principles of CfE and was defined in guidance for practitioners on assessing student achievement produced in 2012 as 'the number and range of experiences and outcomes encountered by learners' (Education Scotland, 2012[13]). In a discussion of interdisciplinary learning in Building the Curriculum 3 (Scottish Government, 2008) this was defined as 'space for learning beyond subject boundaries', where learning can be organised based on groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas. Interviewing system leaders, teachers, students and their parents, the OECD team was struck by how differently they understood breadth in CfE. For most stakeholders, breadth was defined by offering as many subjects as can practically be made available in secondary schools, to give students as much choice as possible in moving to the Senior Phase. This is not an unreasonable position of schools given the backwash of qualifications and the professional profile of teachers as subject specialists. An enquiry by the Scottish Parliament in 2019 into subject choices noted the tensions between the aspiration for a wide choice, and what was termed by one witness as 'the six column environment' (where students choose their options from across six columns). There was no discussion of the meaning of breadth beyond access to subjects. Yet, originally, breadth was envisaged as providing students with opportunities to connect within and across disciplines and with real life contexts and problems. What CfE proposed was not the end of subjects, but a curriculum that made explicit efforts to afford students with those opportunities. In discussions with stakeholders from the primary sector the OECD team, interdisciplinary studies were mentioned but as a marginal activity in curriculum-making and student learning. Discussions with those in post primary did not raise the issue of interdisciplinary studies.

Another important issue related to the contents in senior phase is the balance between knowledge and competencies. Some criticise that the knowledge offered is too limited in order to adequately prepare for academic studies, while others relativise that objection and argue that depth of acquisition and broader 'competencies' are more important for future learning and studies. The OECD team considered that it is desirable to develop a more nuanced view on the role of knowledge in relation to also aspired skills or competencies (as an amalgam of knowledge, skills and attitudes). It is internationally common to gradually move from many subjects (partly grouped into broad learning areas) to more disciplined-based subjects in the academically oriented streams in upper secondary education (cf. O'Donnell, 2018). Such subject-

oriented offers more chances on acquiring deeper learning and understanding, which is also beneficial for generic learning ability. However, one would hope that within those subjects deliberate attempts are made to clarify and demonstrate how such subject-focused learning can contribute to broader aims and themes, including attention to the four fundamental capacities.

Overall, the OECD team considered that, in contrast to how BGE has adopted CfE across the board, the substantive design of the qualification-based courses in the Senior Phase is not consistently in line with the CfE philosophy and does not offer a clear transition for students from BGE into SP. Various comments and observations suggest that the previous curriculum emphases on subjects (including standards) and its organization in previous (2+2+2) structures still dominate and have not adequately been revised and adapted. Policies about subjects, and about breadth in the secondary phase did not develop as needed to support the original vision of CfE during the implementation period. These legacy 'gaps' give rise to the risk of the 'mile-wide-inch-deep' curriculum happening in S1-S3, as identified by the OECD in several education systems a study of curriculum overload (OECD, 2020[14]). They are now impeding the further development of CfE and certainly curtailing its aspirations for learners in secondary schools.

Student learning

The patterns of student learning seem activity-based and showing flexible variation (in line with CfE intentions) in primary and to some extent in lower secondary education. The school case studies provided in the evidence pack (Scottish Government, 2020) are testament to the richness of practices for student learning aligned to CfE, in addition to some of the evidence presented by students during discussions with the OECD team, or some of the data on improvements in outcomes provided in the NIF annual reports.

Student learning patterns show less change in more traditional learning activities at upper secondary level (senior phase), with its strong focus on exam accreditation. Some students in Senior Phase reported to the OECD team (in vivid terms) an emphasis on rather monotonous rote learning and memorisation (experienced as rather boring), with a strong focus on exam preparation. They experience less opportunities for more engaging, intrinsically motivating activities that relate to problem solving, creativity, cooperation or communication. Interestingly, they reported that they experienced more meaningful approaches to learning in the advanced higher courses which seem to better reflect the CfE spirit. Although less explicit, teachers and school leaders also expressed their concerns about the limited instructional patterns in Senior Phase, defending that traditional practices remain in place as they are most efficient in helping student to pass their exams.

In some instances, the espoused aspiration in the CfE vision of learner-centredness appears to be at odds with the competing agendas of standardisation (also induced by policy messages and measures) and preparing for the workforce (Britton, Schweisfurth and Slade, 2019), especially in the later years. This creates continuous tensions between the relevance of learning and accountability mechanisms (Hayward, 2018). In addition, the lack of clear information on student outcomes renders the solid understanding of what student learning in CfE entails challenging.

Teachers role

Teachers in Scotland are regarded as well-educated and respected professionals. The many teachers we had conversations with confirmed this reputation. Overall, we recognize a strong commitment to varied teaching approaches for student learning and curriculum making. During general education teachers appear to be quite successful in that respect. We heard of many testimonies of their efforts to develop CfE curriculum for their students, of their engagement in learning and in moderation to ensure they were assessing their students well, especially in primary and lower secondary education. The case studies on the evidence pack also present concrete teaching practices and approaches (Scottish government, 2020). However, less clarity seems to exist about pedagogical approaches that are well aligned to CfE in

(especially senior) secondary education. Both teachers and school leaders reported ambiguities and difficulties of realising CfE principles and instructional ideals at this level. The move from general teachers to specialised subject teachers in secondary may imply more specialisation and less integration of learning to meet the principles of CfE. As mentioned in the previous section, such varied and challenging approaches are hard to enact in a context where passing exams (that are reflecting quite different emphases) is an obvious priority in the immediate interest of students (and their parents).

At a more practical level, we heard workload concerns about differentiation within multi-level class teaching present in most schools and in particular about assessment moderation.

In terms of commitment to curriculum renewal, the complex context for educational reform (with many competing priorities and tasks and with tensions between autonomy and output regulation) seems to diminish the focus on 'quality teaching for quality learning' (Chapman, 2019). This policy context also reduces opportunities for 'teacher agency' according to selected academics (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015), where teachers (not only individually but also in teams) have more substantial influence in shaping their day-to-day curriculum work. Obviously, translating curriculum policy documents in classroom realties is a complex and demanding task; it needs space, time and support for teacher professional development (Wallace and Priestley, 2017). While many efforts for this professional development have been initiated and many teachers have been developing curriculum and sharing practices across schools and networks, it is clear that sustained investments are always needed.

Materials and resources

CfE has produced large amounts of 'guidance' materials for teachers in an effort to support them to develop their own curriculum in their schools and classrooms. Given the allocated curriculum autonomy, and demands by teachers for guidance, these are important efforts by the Scottish government to support the development of CfE in schools. The OECD team also heard concerns about clarity and practicality of the documentation. Apparently, at least part of the teachers does not benefit from those materials; they need other kinds of materials or additional support and coaching to feel comfortable in enacting the curriculum.

Based on what the OECD team could observe during school visits and analysis of school case studies, most instructional materials seem to be site-specific, developed by teachers themselves, within their own school or in networks with colleagues of schools in their region. Compared to many other countries, Scottish teachers seem to rely much less on textbooks of educational publishers. This may be seen as sign of strong professional capacity of teachers, but it also raises some questions about efficiency, as developing high-quality instructional materials requires a lot of expertise, time and energy, whilst teachers are often not prepared and lack time for this type of work. The use of (non-prescriptive and adaptable) exemplary or 'educative' materials (Ball and Cohen,1996; Davis and Krajcik, 2005) has been shown to release time and energy for teachers for (preferably joint) professional capacity building during adaptation of such materials for their specific context. It may be an option to make the multitude of many separate curriculum policy tools less overwhelming and more actionable for teachers by translating and integrating them in materials that exemplify those essential parts of the curriculum that are experienced as particularly challenging by teachers. Systematic evaluation and subsequent sharing of high-quality materials (such as exemplars) in networks and digital platforms (for instance, through Glow) offer welcome opportunities for support efficient (re)design of practices and professional learning.

Grouping, location and time

The grouping component was less prominent in our conversations with practitioners. We heard few specific comments or problems about grouping of learners, with one exception: organizational and pedagogical challenges about differentiation within multi-level classes.

Similarly, few specific remarks were made on curriculum location as defined in the spider web (Figure). Apparently, in recent years investments in school buildings and facilities have been made. Unsurprisingly, the recent COVID-experiences have spurred improving the IT-infrastructure.

The team also noticed some ambiguity around scheduling of courses in S3 and above. Concerns were reported about the too limited time to go sufficiently into depth for the various subjects, issue which is reviewed in the depth vs breath section.

In addition, the recent COVID circumstances have led to longer than the usual 45 minutes class periods. Especially the learners (but also teachers) appreciate that as it offers more opportunities for varied and deep learning.

Assessment

As part of the CfE policy, a comprehensive assessment framework was proposed in "Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment", a key piece of the CfE framework published in 2011 (Figure). "Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment" aimed to be the main piece of guidance in relation to assessment advice, both in the BGE and across the entire 3-18 learner journey. It was supported by supplementary guidance, covering the following aspects: reporting; understanding and applying shared standards; recognizing achievement, profiling and reporting; and quality assurance and moderation. In 2011 already, the guidance planned to develop and publish benchmarks to complement CfE, which would set out what learners need to know and be able to do upon the achievement of a curriculum level. A wide range of programmes of support for assessment and moderation were developed through collaboration amongst Education Scotland, local authorities and practitioners. They provided practitioners with opportunities to share, engage and reflect on the assessment and moderation of Curriculum for Excellence levels across the broad general education (Scottish Government, 2020).

Figure 2.4. Proposed framework for assessment within CfE 3-18 (2011)

A framework for assessment to support the purposes of learning 3 to 18

Reflecting the values and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*

- applying the values of *Curriculum for Excellence* in an inclusive way
- ensuring that curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment form a coherent experience
- gathering good quality evidence of learners' progress through relevant experiences using a range of approaches which reflect the breadth and depth of achievement in learning
- enabling all learners to maximise their potential and develop across the four capacities using motivating assessment approaches
- using assessment flexibly to meet the needs of all learners regardless of where their learning takes place

What we assess

Application of the national standards and expectations of each learner's progress and achievements in developing:

- knowledge and understanding
- skills
- attributes and capabilities

as detailed in the experiences and outcomes within curriculum areas and subjects and in the curriculum guidance and specifications for qualifications and awards in the senior phase

Principles of assessment: why we assess?

Supporting learning

- sharing learning intentions and success criteria
- high quality interactions and feedback

Promoting learner engagement

- learner involvement in reflection, setting learning goals and next steps including through personal learning planning
- self and peer assessment

Ensuring appropriate support

- to be fair and inclusive
- to enable learners to have the best chance of success

Informing self-evaluation for improvement

Information gathered should:

- contribute to an account of success at local and national levels
- enable the monitoring of standards over time

Learner

Through experiences …
I can show that I can …

literacy | numeracy | health & wellbeing

confident individuals | responsible citizens | effective contributors | successful learners

skills for learning, life and work

When we assess

- as part of ongoing learning and teaching
- periodic (from time to time)
- at transitions

Reporting on progress and achievement

- involving learners, parents and others, for example, profiles, records and reports
- describing progress and achievement against standards and expectations
- giving a valid and reliable account of learning at points of transition as concisely as possible
- recognising learners' achievements including through celebrating success, profiling achievement, and by using certification, accreditation, qualifications and awards

Ensuring quality and confidence in assessment

- developing sound judgements through sharing standards
- supporting assessment through exemplification and CPD

How we assess

- by using a variety of approaches and range of evidence to fit the kind of learning
- by making assessment fit for purpose and appropriately valid, reliable and proportionate
- through partnership working

Source: Scottish Government (2011) Building the Curriculum 5, https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/btc5-framework.pdf

Following the proposed framework, student assessment is promoted as an integral part to learning and teaching, and considered an ongoing process used for formative as well as summative purposes. Up to S3, assessment by teachers is supposed to be the main mode of assessing students' achievements (Scottish Government, 2007). Experiences and outcomes (referred to as "Es+Os") are a set of statements about students' learning and progression in each curriculum area in BGE, which are supposed to help

teachers and learners plan learning and assess progress. Experiences and outcomes are designed to provide for progression in learners' knowledge, skills and deep understanding and determine the framework for teaching and learning in the CfE. At Senior Phase, students transition to a different progression framework depending on their chosen pathway: national qualifications, work-based learning and other awards (Education Scotland, 2016).

Benchmarks have been developed to provide clarity on the national standards expected within each curriculum area and each interdisciplinary area at each level. Using the experiences and outcomes statements, benchmarks set out lines of progression from Early to Fourth Levels to clarify what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels. They help support consistency in practitioners' professional judgements. Schools are expected to report on curriculum level achievement for literacy and numeracy, and data is collected and collated at national level for reporting.

BGE has five levels of progression (early, first, second, third and fourth) that approximately correspond to system levels of pre-school to lower secondary education, although CfE's approach to progression allows in theory for students to attain levels at their own pace. Achievement of a level is based on teachers' overall professional judgement and informed by a range of evidence, against the benchmarks defined for each curriculum level. Senior Phase represents the sixth level of progression in CfE (Scottish Government, 2020).

As part of the assessment framework, practitioners are expected to engage in moderation, a collaborative mechanism through which teachers develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations. Moderation involves practitioner meetings throughout the year to discuss a range of assessment evidence that demonstrate learners' progress and achievement. It takes place at school, local, regional and national levels.

The efforts to structure an approach to student assessment aligned with CfE's philosophy seem to have been adopted in primary schools. The OECD team finds causes for concern, however, in secondary schools and especially, in the Senior Phase. At that stage, assessment (testing and examinations) appears to create considerable tensions and obstacles for realising the CfE intentions. Findings from research portray also portray a complex picture, concluding that the large amount of assessment benchmarks to specify the expectations and outcomes has resulted in over-specified programmes, fragmented instructional tick-box approaches and more bureaucratic than coherent curriculum planning (Priestley and Minty, 2013; Hayward, 2018).

Assessment is an issue of major concern and stress at secondary level, for almost everybody, from students and their parents, to teachers, administrators, media, and politicians (both in parliament and government). Overall, we perceive a zealous focus on achievement labels, levels and scores. It is common in secondary education in many countries, and is definitely the case in Scotland. As mentioned before, there does not appear to be yet a successful alignment of qualifications and exams in Senior Phase with the CfE vision. This is not only challenging for the Senior Phase itself, but also causing a backwash into the later stages of BGE and even the primary sector, hampering the full enactment of the CfE ideals in those stages and creating a gap in student learning and progression as they move through the curriculum.

From the issues raised throughout the OECD visit and the literature, it seems that the education system spends a disproportionate amount of time and energy on technical issues around student assessments and (high-stakes) examinations, whilst there are doubts about the relevance of the goals and contents. This is not a unique feature of Scottish education but a persistent problem in many countries across the OECD that many are aiming to tackle. The COVID pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to explore different alternatives to student assessments that can be considered in the future in relation to this gap.

Overall implementation of CfE

Schools both primary and secondary have developed and implemented their curriculum using the CfE framework. The Box below provides an example from a secondary school in Scotland.

Box 2.1. Curriculum for Excellence in Portlethen Academy (secondary school, Aberdeenshire)

Vision: To be the very best we can be

Values: Learn and improve. Get involved. Think of the consequences. Respect all.

Rationale: Attainment for all and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) have been central planks of our thinking and we have worked to establish a flexible and broad curriculum which is responsive to pupils' needs, interests and aspirations. The offer aims to provide pathways that have strong links to the workplace and to Skills for Life, Learning and Work for all young people. We aim to be flexible and provide experiences that allow young people to focus on interests but are not so narrow as to be limiting. The offer also provides experiences and certification for young people who do not fit the "traditional" profile of the N5s and Highers offer.

Design traits: the curriculum is based on the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. A skills framework is built into curricular content. Personalisation process are offered to pupils as they move from S2 into S3. All of the Senior Phase years (S4-S6) are timetabled together. The Senior Phase has wide curricular offer - young people can choose and achieve qualifications in subjects which allow for progression into employment, further education and higher education. There is a strong focus on Developing the Young Workforce throughout all stages of the curricular offer including numerous qualifications / courses (Foundation Apprenticeships, NPA Enterprise and Employability). Link with North East Scotland College (NESCol) widens the Senior Phase curricular offer. The school is involved in Excelerate programme in conjunction with the Wood Foundation with a developing focus on project-based learning. Key partnerships are developed to enhance learning, e.g. Community Learning and Development (CLD) (Gear Up To Go), Mackie Academy and Mearns Academy (Moving Forward) Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust.

Concretely, the curriculum for the last three years of Broad General Education (lower secondary) imply:

- Pupils follow a curriculum in S1 and S2 designed to give experiences in all subjects they can select from in S3 / Senior Phase
- Personalisation process as pupils progress from S2 into S3
- High level of support offered when personalising the curriculum at the end of S2
- Moving Forward curricular input offered in conjunction with two neighbouring schools for targeted pupils in S3
- Curricular offer developed with Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust to offer a tailored pathway linked to health and wellbeing and sport which leads into an offer in the Senior Phase.
- S3 pupils complete awards during core subjects (Religious Beliefs and values award in RMPS, Employability award in PSE).

In the same school, the Senior Phase curriculum imply:

- S4 - Six subjects including English and Mathematics. Maths and Applications of Mathematics both offered and completed by pupils in S4 to enhance attainment. S4 complete awards during core subjects (Social Anthropology RMPS, Mental Health Award PSE)
- S5 - Five subjects plus an enrichment option (allows for additional subjects / qualifications)
- S6 - Four or five subjects plus an enrichment option
- Pupils choosing a National 4 or National 5 course also complete Personal Finance qualification
- S5 pupils complete Personal Development award at SCQF L6 from session 2020/2021
- S6 pupils complete Leadership Award at SCQF L6 from session 2020/2021

- Wide offer of qualifications (NQ, NPA, SQA Awards, Foundation Apprenticeships)
- Foundation Apprenticeships offered in Accountancy, Children and Young People and Health and Social Care and a pilot Foundation Apprenticeship in Creative and Digital Media (2019/2020), and in additional four frameworks (Business Skills, Engineering, IT Software, Scientific Technologies) in 2020-2021
- Additional pilots explored (SCQF Levels 4 and 5) with the support of the local authority and the Aberdeen FC Community Trust

Source: Scottish Government (2020) Initial evidence pack, unpublished.

The OECD team emphasizes that not each of the curriculum components reviewed have to be specified at all levels (nation, school, classroom) -- on the contrary. In principle, it is advisable that at national level the emphasis is on formulating general directions for why and what matters in order to inspire and regulate further decision making. Vision formulation, common goal statements and joint assessment approaches can outline the general course -- as often it is difficult enough to arrive at some reasonable and workable consensus in those areas. Further interpretation and elaboration for all components are better left to decentral levels where specific choices can be made that fit the local characteristics and preferences.

The OECD team agrees with the view of the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee in its final report on its "Subject Choice in the Senior Phase Inquiry". It states that the implementation of the Senior Phase curriculum has resulted in many schools attempting to implement a new (3+3) curriculum within the structure of the previous (2+2+2) curriculum, resulting in unintended consequences.

This lack of alignment and harmony is in a rather sharp contrast with earlier policy rhetoric about the Senior Phase:

> *The Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles underpin all National Courses. Learners have opportunities to acquire and develop the four capacities, as well as skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work. National Courses provide a statement of a learner's achievement against a defined standard providing learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding in a formal way. The broad objectives of National Courses are to provide high standards, and breadth and depth of learning which will help learners to progress to further study, training and employment.*

The reality of the Senior Phase seems also to deviate from the espoused policy intentions of the new National Courses. The new National Courses were designed to form a qualifications system which:

- supports the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence and support the learning of the new curriculum, including its breadth
- provides a seamless transition from outcomes and experiences, with increased emphasis on skills
- is inclusive, coherent and easy to understand for pupils, parents, staff, employers and other users
- meets the needs of all learners in progressing from prior levels of achievement and provides opportunities for learners to develop at different rates, at different times, in different areas across the curriculum
- provide clear and smooth progression and articulation between different levels of qualifications, to Higher and Advanced Higher, and onto post- school learning and employment
- involves an overall approach to assessment which reduces the time learners spend on assessment for certification and allows more time for learning, and more focus on skills and integration with other aspects of learning
- results in assessment that supports, motivates and challenges learners, with more scope for personalization and choice
- maintains high standards, credibility and relevance.

Practice in the Senior Phase seems to be different than almost all those claims. This gap between the intended curriculum (in formal policy) and the implemented curriculum in (school and classroom) practices seems already to have its roots at the stage of initial curriculum design, where efforts to translate the visionary ideals into qualifications (and related course documents and assessment tools) have not been fully successful, watering down and compromising many initial ideals. Many policy intentions at the introduction of the new qualifications (McAra, Broadley and McLauchlan, 2013) seem not yet to have fulfilled. This was one of the major concerns raised during the national debate on education in 2002 (leading towards the CFE initiative) was that the secondary curriculum had a too strong focus on exams.

Our general conclusion is that the coherence between the various curriculum components as well as the consistency between the policy intentions at large and the implemented curriculum in local contexts is much better for the age groups 3-15 than for 15-18. The Senior Phase, and especially the higher courses do not appear to be in line with CfE intentions in aims, contents, pedagogy and assessment. Its value needs to be assessed and choices made in relation to what is best for students to be prepared for their future rather than existing inertias. At present, as the current tests in Senior Phase are the only way to externally assess what students are learning, these are the incentives that lead the focus of Senior Phase.

What should be the structure of a Senior Phase aligning to CfE? How should learning and teaching be organised? What does breadth of learning really involve (only the number of subjects, interdisciplinary learning, something more)? And how can it be articulated with depth of learning? How much should be obligatory and how much room is available for personal choice (and thus variation)? In our perception, a balanced discussion with active input from stakeholders with different perspectives and interests seems highly desirable. It is necessary, first, for the productivity of such a debate to reach more clarity in what the Scottish system means by the key terminology of "knowledge", "skills", "attitudes", "attributes", "capacities", "capabilities", "competences", "dispositions" and the like. Although it is a matter of deliberations within the Scottish context, support from curriculum design scholars would help get those definitions in line with the concepts from the literature. Some inspiration about options could be offered by international trends and promising examples (see, for example, O'Donnell, 2028, for a comparative study, and also various publications from the OCED 2030 project). The current COVID situation can actually be a good opportunity to engage in this discussion.

Comparing the relations between the intended, implemented and attained curriculum we see many good practices. The original policy intention of CfE was to provide a future-oriented curriculum with a clear vision that gives more autonomy, space and flexibility for schools to adapt and enact it. We have seen testimony of this approach, building on a high-quality teaching workforce, pedagogical leadership and availability of support approaches and materials for schools and their professionals. Although the actual task of curriculum making still appears to be challenging for all schools across Scotland, we notice a variable, but gradually growing capacity. That is important to realise as it takes long term investments and patience for such processes to become successful and institutionalised. That lesson can be learned from, for example, the four decades that it took education in Finland to build up such bottom-up curricular capacity in communities and schools, with lots of patience, stamina and ongoing support (Halinen and Holappa, 2013; Halinen, 2018). However, it is encouraging to see that there appear to be many strong school leaders able to lead their schools to develop and build on the strengths of CfE for their students. The new initiative to lead more 'from the middle' (see OECD 2015), resulting in the establishment of six Regional Improvement Collaboratives, might support such curricular capacity building. Thus far, the experienced support by these RICs seems more limited than hoped for. Again, more time and energy plus adequate leadership are probably needed.

While there are good intentions and practices across the system, the implementation shows a large variety of practices between schools and classrooms. This leads to questions whether the intended autonomy and flexible practices of schools and flexibility are threatening the also aspired equity in experiences and outcomes. Thus far, the attainment gap appears to have somewhat decreased over the last decade (National Improvement Framework Interactive Evidence Report, September 2019). However, we notice

also reports about the tension between curricular freedom of schools (resulting in increasing variety), whilst qualifications remain to be determined by a national agency that is also increasing its own number of qualifications (SQA).

Further efforts are needed to ensure that the variety of practices are of high quality so that the CfE contributes to close the gap. However, this is not only up to schools alone. Wider public, socio-economic investments and support seem indispensable in domains such as housing, health, and jobs.

Beyond CfE implementation, looking at impact, we have noted positive impressions of the attained curriculum (in terms of learner experiences and results) as mentioned by many we have met and confirmed by our own observations during conversation with students: learners seem confident, communicative, engaged, analytical, and they are quite keen on making (more) choices themselves. Many interviewees express that students are nowadays much more all-round in their development and that they show more curious behaviour and a stronger entrepreneurial attitude than in previous decades. Those are positive outcomes.

However, there is a shortage of valid and reliable evaluation data on such student outcomes at system level. Using PISA data about the achievements of 15 years old student on a few subjects as indicators of CfE impact on learners is not very helpful as they are only a limited reflection of the CfE intentions. Moreover, superficial interpretation of (limited) data on student achievement (as often done in media) does usually more result in confusion and frustration than in clarity, leading towards meaningful improvements.

As one of the interviewed researchers expressed: Scotland is drowning in data, but they are of dubious usability. Collecting data is not the same as high-quality research that contributes to understanding and to offering meaningful feedback and feedforward to the system.

Referring to the potentially added value of educational research to curriculum development, we notice a relative shortage of design-based curriculum research in Scotland. Most published research is of a descriptive, analytical, conceptual or critical nature. That may be relevant in various ways but we have seen few examples, with exception of Drew, Priestley & Michael (2016), of collaborative efforts of researchers and teachers to systematically address practical curricular problems in such a way that it contributes to improvement of curriculum design and implementation, to professional development of the participants involved and of knowledge growth about those challenges (cf. van den Akker and Nieveen, in press; Mintrop, 2016; see also various chapters in Pieters, Voogt and Pareja Roblin, 2019). Thus, we endorse the recent ICEA-plea for more and stronger Research-Practice Partnerships and for design-based research, which can occur through various modalities, such as Lesson Study, Teacher Design Teams, and Professional Learning Communities. They all have in common that they start with analyzing real-life, context-specific problems of practitioners and that systematic exploration, design and trying out occurs (usually with iterative approaches) during long term interaction with researchers.

About the amount and quality of resources, teachers (obviously the main actors in daily curriculum making) expressed (perhaps surprisingly) few explicit complaints. Even facilities and time for professional development seemed more or less acceptable, although the politeness of the teachers we interviewed perhaps prevented them from strong criticism. Other observers (outside schools) expressed they thought teachers would definitely need more time for professional learning, for example by spending less time on actual classroom teaching and having more time available for professional learning. In particular, collaborative team work on school-wide curriculum arrangements and on strengthening pedagogical classroom repertoire was recommended.

Our impression is that, also in this respect, there is quite some variation across the system in intensity and modes of teacher professional development, and also in the support that teachers experience form their own school context, their Local Authorities and the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (where applicable).

Conclusion

CfE as a policy was a bold initiative in its inception that has progressed and reached school across Scotland. Its main vision and objectives are still relevant. It remains valid for its bold, aspirational, future-oriented approach, and continues being an inspiring international example, with its four capacities focused on holistic student learning that combines knowledge, skills and competencies for the future. It has served as example to many other countries and its key message has strong resemblance with the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of OECD (Compass for Learning). CfE allows for reasonable coherence and seems to have been consolidated in Broad General Education for learners aged 3-15. It has been implemented and adopted across schools up to this age, where the concepts of CfE, the pedagogical approaches, the learning and assessments appear to be well consolidated.

After two decades since its inception, Scotland should consider renewing its commitment to CfE's bold and relevant vision. A key challenge facing CfE is how to create more coherence and alignment between the curricular vision and goals for learning, a suitable pedagogy and adequate assessment approaches, especially in light of COVID, for student learning and progression across their school years. CfE has worthwhile ideals and its implementation has been accomplished in primary and lower secondary, but the coherence of CfE enactment is less consistent in the Senior Phase (for learners aged 15-18), where fundamental challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment redesign. Without taking up this task, the practices in upper secondary education will keep lagging behind in its curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment), and will also exercise a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education and the transition for students.

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3 Stakeholder engagement at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence

In Scotland, significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which have contributed to its success. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE has created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision, but progress is required at the system level so stakeholders are fully empowered and engaged in the decision-making process. Stakeholders lack transparency on where their responsibilities to CfE lie in comparison with to the responsibilities of others, which creates confusion. Scotland succeeded in establishing the education language of CfE over time, but communication has become confusing.

An overview of stakeholder engagement with CfE

In curriculum policy, stakeholders are individuals (e.g. teachers, parents, school principals, students and politicians), experts in subjects, pedagogy and curricular studies (scientific community), and collective entities (e.g. ministry of education, national agencies, local authorities, teacher unions) concerned with the curriculum. Their engagement refers to the processes via which they get involved, take responsibilities and interact throughout the curriculum's lifecycle, from design to implementation, in daily practice and during reviews.

In Scotland, the ecosystem around CfE is made of numerous stakeholder groups, bodies, and individuals, all very engaged by the curriculum policy's evolutions. The OECD team met with a significant number of CfE stakeholders, who provided their perspective on implementation and explained the way they engage with CfE, and with other stakeholders around CfE.

Table 3.1. Overview of major CfE stakeholders

Stakeholders	Role in education in relation to CfE
Scottish Government's Learning Directorate	Scottish Government department dedicated to the school system and wider learning environment. The Learning Directorate is responsible for promoting quality implementation of CfE; developing the teaching workforce and educational leadership; ensuring infrastructure and access to digital technology; and pursuing performance improvement, innovation and good practice in education overall.
Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee	Monitors education and education policy on behalf of Scottish Parliament. The Committee investigates specific aspects of CfE and its implementation, provides recommendations and holds the Scottish Government accountable.
Scottish Education Council (SEC)	Main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017. The SEC provides strategic advice to Ministers on education improvement; and aims to lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the Curriculum and Assessment Board and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education; and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers.
Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB)	Main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017. The CAB oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education; considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all; supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish Ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups. It is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, and members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), community learning and development (CLD) representatives.
International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA)	Established in 2016 to advise the First and Deputy First Ministers on how best to achieve excellence and equity in the Scottish education system based on international best practice. ICEA members are education experts from Scotland and worldwide.
Education Leaders Forum	established in 2018 to capture the views of a wide stakeholder group on the development of the education system. It is chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and has input from young people, teachers' professional associations, scholars, parent associations, SDS, and CLD representatives.
Education Scotland (ES)	Public agency under Scottish Government authority, responsible for quality assurance and improvement in education. ES mandate includes overseeing implementation and quality of curriculum and assessment; carrying out school evaluations as Scotland's inspectorate; providing support for teachers and education, including continuous professional development; providing instructional and support materials for teachers in specific areas (such as emotional well-being and raising attainment for all); and conducting research. Education Scotland and predecessors have been key actors of CfE policy developments, monitoring and implementation support since 2009-10.
Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Statutory body for qualification awarding and regulation in Scotland. SQA's duties are to develop or accredit, validate, assure quality, award and inform on attainment of a broad range of Scottish qualifications including "National 5", "Highers" and "Advanced Highers", and "National Progression Awards". SQA sits on key governance committees and working groups regarding CfE implementation. It was especially involved in the revision of national qualifications and provision of material in early CfE implementation.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership	Body managing the SCQF, which classifies and allows for comparing all qualifications available in Scotland into one framework. Awarding bodies such as the SQA use this information to develop course content and assessment. The SCQF Board of Directors includes representatives of College Development Network, Quality Assurance for Higher Education, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, and employers.
Local authorities	Local level of government in Scotland. The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory

	responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. They take part in CfE developments at national level (e.g. the CAB includes representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland [ADES]) and support implementation at school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms (funding, discussion of subject selection and time allocation, provision of authority-wide CfE guidance, specific support at school or cluster level. LAs also provide support via the 6 Regional Improvement Collaboratives.
Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)	Sub-national bodies established in 2017 to promote effective collaboration around educational improvement and equity across local authorities. The six RICs are responsible for promoting educational improvement initiatives (including in the form of school support and professional learning offers for teachers); and supporting collaboration across local authorities, and with schools, Education Scotland and other stakeholders.
Teachers and school leaders ("headteachers")	Develop and use own school curriculum based on CfE framework to accompany student learning. Most teachers develop their own materials to teach according to the school's curriculum (especially in BGE); prepare students for qualifications (in Senior Phase); assess and report on progress; communicate with parents. School leaders support teachers; lead curriculum making; manage the school and its partnerships; translate policy into school practice. Teachers and school leaders usually collaborate with peers from other schools and with local, regional and national bodies to share practice and further develop CfE.
Teachers and school leaders unions	Represent the teaching profession's interests in education policy and professional negotiations and generally support the profession via training and other professional network activities. Union representatives sit on key governance committees and working groups to share their perspective with education authorities, agencies and other stakeholders. Major unions include School Leaders Scotland and Association of Heads and Deputes in Scotland (AHDS), Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).
Teacher Panel	established in 2016 to provide views on de-cluttering, workload and bureaucracy in order to enhance the effectiveness of the interaction between pupil and teacher.
BOCSH group	Consortium of senior curriculum managers from half of the 32 local authorities working with national bodies to support curriculum leadership. BOCSH members provide exemplar materials to support local authorities, schools, curricular leaders and teachers engaged in implementing the CfE; highlight good practice in whole-school approach to CfE in BGE and Senior Phase.
General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)	Independent professional body promoting and regulating the teaching profession in Scotland. GTCS maintains professional standards; sets the requirements and advises Ministers for teacher training; supports new teachers during induction; assess teachers' qualifications and experience; manages the professional register.
Strategic Board for Teacher Education	National forum for discussion between key education stakeholders on teaching standards and teacher education. The Board oversees and evaluates reforms to teacher education from the perspective of the Teaching Scotland's Future report (2016).
Students ("learners")	Participate in learning in school and other settings from 3 to 18 and beyond. CfE promotes active participation from learners in their learning and in society in general.
Children and young people organisations	Defend children's rights and promote their citizen participation. Scotland's Children's Parliament supports children's participation and engagement, and works with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies to promote and protect children's rights. The Scottish Youth Parliament aims to represent the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people and their views of young people on societal issues.
Youth work agencies	Ensure every young person has access to quality youth work opportunities (e.g. Youth Link Scotland, Young Scot). Youth work is part of Community Learning and Development (CLD), whose professionals help people of all ages with their professional orientation and development. National youth work agencies are partners in CfE implementation for diversification of senior phase pathways and positive post-school destination; career education and other activities related to the "world of work".
Scottish Learner Panel	comprised of 30 children and young people from nine school settings from across Scotland. The panel deliver their views on education policy to the Scottish Government. The panel met on five occasions in 2018-2019 and published a final report.
Parents and parent organisations	Parents (and guardians) participate in students' education, are informed by schools and can take part in schools' parent council. Organisation support parent engagement with their local schools (e.g. via parent councils) and represent parent interests in national policy making. The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NFPS) represents parent councils across Scotland, with national and local government, and other organisations. Connect supports parents' groups nationally to get involved in schools.
Higher education institutions (universities)	19 institutions offer higher education in Scotland. University representatives sit on the Curriculum and Assessment Board; work with other key stakeholders to ensure CfE prepares learners for university and qualifications provide clear pathways to learners. Universities Scotland works for and represents the 19 institutions and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education represents their School of Education.
Education researchers	Investigate various themes in education, including CfE. Researchers provide central insight for CfE developments, feed into the evidence base for educational and policy leadership and practices, and contribute to informing and advising authorities. They sit on key governance, advisory and working committees and participate in specific programmes contributing to CfE developments.
Commission for Widening Access to University	Gathers Scottish Government officials and stakeholders to tackle socioeconomic inequality in higher education, by leading the implementation of recommendations contained in the final report of the Commission

	on Widening Access.
Further education institutions (colleges)	26 colleges offer further education in Scotland. College representatives and their organisations participate in CfE developments and implementation. E.g.: Colleges Scotland is part of the Curriculum Narrative Strategic Engagement Group (2018). Colleges Development Network sat on the CfE Management Board (2007-2017) and provides colleges with trainings, events, specialist projects.
Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	Public arms-length body responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in colleges and universities. SFC is identified among the national partners for CfE implementation, including to fund teacher professionalization aligned with CfE priorities, support DYW and other programmes to implement CfE priorities in relation with colleges, facilitate partnerships between schools, local authorities and colleges, and contribute to data collection in the college sector.
Employers	Work with colleges, schools and other stakeholders (e.g. SDS) to provide work-based experiences in line with CfE.
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)	Helps individuals manage their career and build employability skills from school onwards. SDS works with employers under ministerial guidance on a national, sectoral, regional, local and individual basis to recognise and articulate current and future skills needs, and to engage with the skills system to cater to those needs.

Note: The roles summarised here are based on official documentation and stakeholders' own views.

Stakeholder engagement, and more specifically, involvement, communication and transparency matter in Curriculum for Excellence's implementation for a number of reasons. First, because in Scotland, like globally, education systems are now characterised by multi-level governance, with multiple actors operating at different levels, whose links to each other are to a certain extent fluid and open to negotiation. Attention to stakeholder engagement in education policy implementation has increased as a result of three trends: a greater awareness of the importance of education quality for a country's future; new technologies allowing citizens to be more vocal about policy matters outside of traditional engagement mechanisms; and high degrees of citizen participation as a result (Burns and Köster, 2016). In addition, governance arrangements have become more complex and decentralised, with greater engagement in policy and implementation processes across different levels of education systems (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Against this backdrop, different stakeholders are more likely to exert their agency, either to support or oppose curriculum changes, and influence the organisations or communities they are embedded in (Lemke and Harris-Wai, 2015).

Second, efforts of collaboration, consensus, co-design, partnership and empowerment are central to the rhetoric around CfE and education in Scotland. They are also important to implement if curriculum processes are to respect CfE principles. Especially, school-based curriculum design requires meaningful engagement to develop shared meaning and ownership of CfE concepts, and empower key actors of curriculum. Such meaningful forms of engagement imply trust and allow for collaboration and practice sharing between stakeholders; clarity on whose responsibility it is to provide school support and professional learning; and clear two-way communication about policy evolution, priorities and difficulties at local and national levels.

Finally, ongoing needs for adjustment throughout CfE lifecycle also require shared meaning, deep involvement of stakeholders, trust and effective decision-making for effective change to take place. In a system seeking collaborative leadership and empowerment, decision making is not top-down but consists of inclusive and fruitful discussions between stakeholders who know and have the resources to assume their responsibilities, which results in effective and trustworthy decisions.

Significant efforts have been made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle (2004-present), which contributed to some successes with CfE and shall be explained. However, issues related to stakeholder engagement remain that complicate CfE implementation, and at times even hinder it. The following sections analyse the progress made and pending issues of engagement, in terms of stakeholder involvement, transparency of responsibilities, and communication.

From inclusive involvement to a collective ownership of CfE

Involvement refers to the opportunity stakeholders have to influence and shape the policy, whether it is through its design or implementation. It is determined on the one hand by government-created channels to encourage participation of stakeholders, and on the other hand, by stakeholders' own willingness and capacity to take part in the process. Stakeholders can get involved in many different ways, such as through public or internal consultations, boards, councils and committees, union dialogues, networks, surveys, research projects and publications ((OECD, 2020[1])). Key stakeholders' involvement in education policy development and implementation can help cultivate a sense of joint ownership over policies and hence build more effective and relevant reforms (Finlay, 1998[2])).

The process preceding and developing CfE aimed to engaged stakeholders widely and in a more involved way than previously in Scotland. Past national curriculum developments were supported by central guidelines, cascade models of staff development and resources provided to support the implementation of guidance by teachers. In comparison, the approach to CfE development aimed to engage practitioners from the beginning, involving them in thinking about the educational aims, values, and classroom practice. The engagement consisted in work about various components of CfE carried out in collaboration between the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and HM Inspectorate of Education with involvement by education authorities, schools, colleges, professional associations and scholars (Scottish Government, 2006[3]).

Consultation and collaboration are at the core of CfE processes, as much in policy design as in curriculum delivery. As a result, stakeholders get involved frequently and intensely with CfE, which, as acknowledged to the OECD team by system leaders, top advisory groups and practitioners, marks remarkable progress from a time when there was admittedly a lack of engagement and support across the system (OECD interviews). An extensive range of options for stakeholders' involvement with CfE exist, both at the initiative of authorities and of other stakeholders themselves. This tendency emerged from the beginning of CfE, through its development, and continues to characterise the stakeholder ecosystem (Scottish Government, 2008[9]; Scottish Government, 2020[10]). Stakeholders have been involved in the design of CfE and are still involved in its daily implementation and ongoing evolution via:

- Participation in governance committees, for instance: Curriculum and Assessment Board, formerly CfE Management Board;
- Feedback provision through advisory and consultation entities, for instance: ICEA, Learner Panel;
- Expression of organised interests through platforms and representative bodies, such as: teacher unions, children and youth organisations, parent organisations;
- Discussion between professionals and education leaders at various levels, including in: ADES, COSLA, BOSCH group, and initiatives to of practice sharing between schools;
- Decisions made by school communities as part of the ongoing process of curriculum design;
- Submissions to Parliamentary enquiries, for instance via the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Skills;
- Research projects and publications around CfE;

The high degree of stakeholder involvement contributed to wide support for CfE as a direction of travel for Scottish education, which matters greatly considering this vision fits both Scottish ambitions and what the international community understands as essential for learners in the 21st century. Both the stakeholders met and the documentation reviewed by the OECD team show broad support for a curriculum policy that helps students develop into successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors; and that enables school communities to design their curriculum and teachers to teach in the way they see fit best their students' needs (Priestley, 2018[6]; S, 2013[7]). A clear signal of the width of this support is that critiques of CfE tend to highlight the way the policy is implemented as the main issue,

especially in secondary education, rather than the vision it pursues. The counter proposals to CfE that the OECD team could observe consist more of going back to CfE's vision and basic principles, and assessing whether current practices realise them, than questioning the basic principles altogether (Humes, 2020[13]; Commission on school reform, 2020[14]; Biesta G, 2015[15]; OECD interviews, 2020[16]).

The many ways to get involved with CfE aim to offer various kinds of stakeholder participation, from information and consultation to collaboration and empowerment. CfE is described by policy makers as being co-designed and delivered collaboratively and by consensus, through joint planning, implementation and monitoring between local and national partners (Scottish Government, 2020[10]). Stakeholders across the system appreciate the constant efforts made by Scottish authorities to engage with them and welcomed the many opportunities they have to communicate their perspectives on CfE. Referring to the development of CfE, several practitioners and local officials acknowledged that the policy had been "developed from the ground up", with national authorities guiding the process and practitioners getting involved in developing and testing the learning areas (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). Extensive evidence highlight that consensus between stakeholders is an important factor for successful implementation of policy reforms (Corrales, 1999[12]; Connell and Klem, 2012[13]). Enabling this consensus to extend to a sense of shared values and shared mission can improve educational outcomes (OECD, 2018[14]).

Like Scotland, other education systems established the principle of local design, which implies that schools and their community design their own school curriculum within the new national framework. This principle enshrines stakeholders' engagement throughout the policy lifecycle. Local curriculum design suggests that schools should engage with students, parents, local actors and other schools bot when they change and when they implement their curriculum. In New Zealand, for instance, the Ministry of Education emphasises seeking inputs from students, parents and local actors as a high-impact practice for local curriculum design. As a result, educators are expected to work together with parents and the community to design a curriculum relevant to their own local context (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019[15]).

With more than a decade of implementation, CfE shows that continuous and proactive involvement by stakeholders is central to the policy's functioning. CfE implied significant shifts in the way education is delivered in Scotland, including greater professional agency and progressive empowerment of schools (see Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the policy environment). "Empowerment" is, to some extent, the ultimate form of stakeholder engagement, and very adequate to aspects of CfE such as curriculum making. Stakeholders appreciated the efforts made by national authorities to help empower schools and the profession. Initiatives of enquiry based continuous professional development (CPD, also referred to as "professional learning") and professional collaboration were especially highlighted as having a beneficial impact on teachers' deep understanding of CfE and self-efficacy in curriculum making. Scholars interviewed by the OECD team described for instance that enquiry into teachers' own practice seem to empower them to exert their professional agency and to embed it into practice, although these developments still needed to be comforted to be fully embedded in daily curriculum making practices (Priestley M, 2019[21]; Drew V, 2016[22]; OECD interviews, 2020[16]).

CfE requires collaboration between stakeholders, both as part of governance and daily implementation of schools' curricula, given the diversity of knowledge, skills and values students are expected to gain to develop the four capacities. School practitioners and local actors consistently reported to the OECD team best curriculum experiences for students were provided where there was communication and collaboration within the school (between teachers, school leadership and students) and with school partners. A central characteristics of CfE is its attempt at offering and promoting diversified pathways to fit what learners want and need to study. In this, collaboration and partnerships between schools and their partners were especially highlighted as a key factor of success. The OECD team met for instance with practitioners and learners from two high schools in Agyll and Bute who entered a formal partnership that significantly widened the courses on offer for students of the smaller school while creating systematic professional exchanges that benefit both schools. Other ways to offer diverse learning to students included schools' partnerships with colleges and universities (for additional subjects and qualifications); with Skills

Development Scotland (for career education); and with locals charities and firms (for work-based experiences including apprenticeships). CfE is seen by schools and some actors from higher and further education as an underpinning factor to make the tertiary sector more coherent (see box).

Box 3.1. Multi-stakeholder partnership to diversify learners pathways

Learning outside schools, in the community

Partnership is central to the everyday implementation of schools' curricula within CfE framework, including to fulfil CfE's aim to diversify the possible pathways learners can shape and take to fit their ambitions. One of the many possibilities offered with CfE curricula is for learners who do not feel at ease in a very academic setting, to design a flexible learning setting that fits their needs and preferences while keeping them interested in learning. The OECD team met with representatives from the Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector, one of schools' many possible partners for diversifying learning experiences. According to CLD actors, the quality of outcomes and experiences for learners depended in a large part on whether there were strong partnerships between schools, CLD actors, and third sector provider (e.g. football clubs). These partnerships allow for designing personalised curriculum, starting where the young person is and what her needs are. The customised curriculum can be delivered in a combination of the school setting, college, community setting. Some of those curricula initially developed for one youth can be scaled up into a larger pathway, e.g. partnership programmes, homeschool learning partnerships using Pupil Equity Funding, YMCA, summer/Easter programmes.

… and at other education levels

Another possible type of partnership for schools to diversify their learners' experience is with colleges and universities. Both colleges and universities help widen the perspectives of students in upper secondary education, and provide special programmes (in universities) and early courses (in colleges) to help school students adapt their learning styles. Where partnerships are strong, schools plan to leave time for school students to engage with college courses and beyond, be part of the college communities.

Source: (OECD interviews, 2020[16])

Beyond a great degree of involvement and collaboration, CfE's philosophy required that stakeholders, and especially teachers and school leaders, take ownership of the curriculum policy, a central factor for its successful implementation (Mikser, Kärner and Krull, 2016[18]). Curriculum ownership implies two things for stakeholders: first, it provides individuals with a sense of satisfaction related to psychic comfort, pleasure and security, a conducive condition for stakeholders to support and carry out the new curriculum. Second, ownership is accompanied by the willingness to assume responsibilities, risks, and sacrifices. Experienced responsibilities motivate stakeholders to invest time and energy to advance the cause of the curriculum reform (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2003[19]). In order to capture stakeholders' perspective on these two aspects of ownership, the OECD team asked the question "who owns CfE?" during interviews. Responses consistently pointed in a similar direction: all key stakeholders felt they shared ownership of CfE at some degree. They all agreed that this sense of ownership should be felt first by teachers, school leaders and learners, which was the case in an increasing number of schools. However, stakeholders also consistently pointed out that this sense of collective ownership, although in line with CfE's philosophy, was misaligned with the actual distribution of responsibilities, trust and influence in decision making (OECD interviews). This possible misalignment will be investigated further in the following section (transparency).

CfE largely shifted the locus of curriculum design into schools, which calls for stakeholder involvement to go beyond consultation towards collaborative decision-making. The literature on stakeholder engagement

and participation in public decision-making classifies several stakeholder involvement mechanisms that have different purposes and various degrees of intensity (Arnstein, 1969[20]; Pretty, 1995[21]; White, 1996[22]). The classifications vary around the following, by order of intensity (International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), 2014[23]):

- Information
- Consultation
- Involvement
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

Most Scottish stakeholders take the opportunities to communicate their views (through consultation and involvement in working groups and governance committees), yet there seems to be a limited impact of these views on effective enhancements to CfE implementation. Stakeholders from several groups reported to the OECD team a general feeling that their involvement and collaboration in decision-making processes was rather informative and removed from the actual decisions made (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). For a system that engages quite systematically with stakeholders, it is impossible to satisfy all views on every issue: some decisions must be taken and compromises reached. Yet, when seeking consensual and collaborative decision-making and delivery in a system, trust between system leaders and other stakeholders is essential. Although some of the stakeholders interviewed were already involved in governance committees, and thus close to decision-making, they did not necessarily trust that their participation had a real weight on decision-making. Trust is built through repeated interaction in which actors show trustworthy behaviour (Cerna, 2014[24]). What is at stakes for system leaders (whether at national, regional or local level) is therefore to nurture this trust so stakeholder engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation.

Especially, two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and their consistence with the use of stakeholders' input. The purpose of engagement initiatives is not always clear and consistent. Clarifying the purpose of engagement initiatives helps adjust stakeholders' expectations of the impact of their contribution. In a consultation, stakeholders may expect their input to feed into the reflection prior to a decisions but not to determine it. As part of a governance committee or group supposed to participate in decision making, stakeholders may expect for their input to weigh equally to their counterparts. The Scottish Empowerment Agenda, neatly aligned to support the teaching profession's role in CfE Second, had clear effects on school leadership empowerment but does not yet seem to have allowed the same empowerment for teachers. The perspective from several of the stakeholders interviewed was that the "rhetoric of empowerment" goes in the right direction, but that the way the empowerment agenda is structured prevents the very agency, both individual and collective, that empowerment is about: empowerment seems handed to people (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). Empowerment is a process, which requires trust between decision makers and stakeholders, since it must take time to take roots, and resources and support as the stakeholders empower themselves and develop the capabilities, expertise and self-confidence to fulfil their mission.

Scottish stakeholders expect their input to be taken into account effectively and in agreement with the purpose given to the initiatives they participate to. Clarifying how decisions are reached and highlighting how evidence has been considered help make decision-making processes transparent and comprehensible. Specific tools include (publicly) accessible documents and exchange formats that discuss decisions and how they were reached (Köster, Shewbridge and Krämer, 2020[25]). For instance, the OECD team was repeatedly told that although a number of initiatives existed to get learners involved around CfE, both at school and national level, stakeholders found that their outcomes was not enough taken into account within decisions. Scottish education is very attached to consulting learners and engaging them in their learning, even more so within the CfE framework, and learners' input and proposals are key to enhance CfE implementation. As put in one of the OECD team's interview: "if one asks the young what

they want, they will first want all choices in the world. But if you work with them on what that actually means, they would realise that having the choice is not about doing everything." (OECD interviews, 2020[16]).

Students are key stakeholders in reforms aimed at improving their educational outcomes (OECD, 2018[14]). As education systems move towards putting students and their learning at the centre of policy development, one way for policy reforms to promote student learning is to give students a voice and ensure that reforms meet their needs and enhance their well-being (Mitra, 2007[26]; Simmons, Graham and Thomas, 2014[27]). Students have unique perspectives of their learning environments, and their views should be sought and considered, recognising that students themselves have a diversity of views on requirements of the education system, based on their background and experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006[28]).

Successful examples of stakeholder involvement around curriculum issues nurture trust with stakeholders and build upon clarity of purpose and consistence. Box XX highlight examples of two different but similarly promising processes of stakeholder involvement: Ireland's National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) review of upper secondary education, and Wales' co-construction process of its new Curriculum for Wales.

Box 3.2. Stakeholder involvement around upper secondary education in Ireland

Stakeholder involvement around upper secondary education in Ireland

The NCCA initiated a comprehensive review of its upper secondary education (Senior Cycle) which had not been revised in decades. The aim was to engage all key senior cycle stakeholders early in the policy process, to gather their perspective and to report to the Minister based on their contributions. More specifically, the review aims to get a range of perspectives on the purpose, future, structure and functioning of senior cycle education.

The review was conceived around three phases. The first phase (2016/17) consisted of identifying topics to explore in relation to upper secondary education, exploring the various approaches to conduct the senior cycle review as well as conducting a comparative study with other jurisdictions. The second phase (2018/19) involved two full cycles of reviews at both school (through school-based reviews) and national levels (through national seminars). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) served as a scientific adviser and contributed to the analysis of all the collected data throughout the process. Each cycle of the school-based reviews concluded with a series of national seminars.

The first series of seminars was built mainly on the presentation of the results from cycle 1 school-based reviews. In response to participants' feedback on these first seminars, the NCCA re-designed the second series of seminars to include shorter presentation time and to give more time to discussions among the stakeholders participating. At the end of each series of seminars, the NCCA published a bulletin with the results and sent this to schools and stakeholders. In addition, all materials produced in this review and discussions are published online for the general public to consult. The third phase (2019) consists of a round of public debate and discussions around a consultation document produced by the NCCA from the information collected in the first and second phases. An advisory report will be prepared once the third phase of the review is completed, which will be presented to the Department for Education and Skills, to inform its decision about whether and how to change senior cycle curriculum.

Co-construction of curriculum policy in Wales (GB)

As it started reforming its curriculum policy, Wales also initiated a new way to make education policy in its system. Co-construction consists in continuous collaboration with stakeholders from across the education system in policy making. The curriculum policy in Wales has been co-constructed from the early stages of conception, effectively developing the curriculum based on the conjunction of practitioners' knowledge, Pioneer schools' experience and experts' input. The widespread and systematic use of co-construction in Wales is commendable. Three key mechanisms have supported co-construction throughout the policy process: the Pioneer Schools Network, working groups and consultations. While policy co-construction requires a significant investment in time and effort in the short term, it also encourages stakeholders to collaborate, trust each other, and own and support reforms in the longer term. As the planner and co-ordinator of education policy committed to co-construction, the Welsh Government has to maintain a challenging equilibrium between providing the necessary guidance for all other stakeholders to act in a co-ordinated manner, and leaving enough space for them to take ownership of the new curriculum.

Source: OECD 2020 Ireland; OECD 2020 Wales

The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE creates, at the same time the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision, and a risk of confusion if stakeholders have little transparency on where their responsibilities lie compared to the roles and responsibilities of others.

Responsibilities for a more transparent engagement

Transparency of responsibilities refers to a set of measures that enable multiple stakeholders involved in the policy implementation process to know what everyone's role is, and to be able to track their own and others' progress throughout the implementation period. A transparent process fosters trust among stakeholders, is collective, and involves stakeholders in defining their roles and monitoring their performance. Transparency of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms is essential for effective decision-making, and for stakeholders to find the self-confidence and support to implement CfE, especially within a complex governance for the existing system. Ambiguous or overlapping responsibilities and roles can lead to confusion, and considerable effort may be needed to overcome initial misunderstandings and associated anxiety. The question of which actors at which levels should be accountable for which outcomes and how to resolve potential accountability tensions is a challenge for many education systems (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[29]).

Curriculum for Excellence establishes that governance of and accountability for the curriculum in Scottish schools is a shared responsibility between the Scottish Government's Directorates, national bodies including SQA and Education Scotland, local government and schools. The Scottish Government sets the national policy context and is accountable for system performance. Advisory boards and committees such as the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) and the International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA) feed advice into Scottish Government's decision-making process. Education Scotland and SQA support implementation and ensure quality of the curriculum, and qualifications, respectively. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality at local level and are accountable locally for the nature and quality of delivery and outcomes. School leaders ("head teachers") are responsible for ensuring a curriculum that meets the needs of children and young people in their schools (Scottish Government, 2020[10]).

A shared responsibility led by schools aligns with CfE principles, and as the OECD team observed, stakeholders generally agree that CfE relies on collective responsibility. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities (including local authorities, RICs, professional networks and unions, national bodies and the Scottish Government) to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework, through curriculum delivery and policy changes. Admittedly, the Scottish Government and its Secretary for Education and Skills retain political responsibility for the progress of CfE as a major education policy (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). This commitment to shared responsibility signals progress towards a form of "leadership by the middle" that a former OECD review called for in Scotland. Leadership by the middle is characterised by different organisations taking responsibility to drive educational improvements on behalf of the system, and therefore relies on transparency of responsibilities (OECD, 2015[30]).

Education systems find various ways to distribute responsibility around curriculum policy and implementation. With CfE shifting curriculum making to schools and teachers, and willing to evolve toward a more trust-based system of accountability, the example of Finland could be of interest (Box).

Box 3.3. Trust-based transparency in Finland

Finland has consistently ranked among the top performing education systems since the beginning of the 21st century. Among the factors of its success, Finland's culture of trust, cooperation and responsibility underpin the system's high performance. The National Board develops its strategic guidelines on educational funding, legislation, evaluation, and curriculum content based on educational research and through consultation and discussion. As such, the central authority steers but does not prescribe in detail the national curriculum. Instead, trusted teams of highly qualified teachers effectively write most of the curriculum together at the local level, to adjust to their students within the national framework. Trust in the profession and in school leaders owes on the one hand, to their high qualifications, expertise and widespread commitment and responsibility, while on the other hand, trust is actively built through deliberate structures and initiatives. These structures combine horizontal and vertical teamwork, networking, participation, target-setting and self- evaluation. Interventions from the top are most often replaced by cooperative problem solving, and relationships with hierarchies are appeased. Instead of top-down external interventions that concentrate on issues such as closing achievement gaps or raising performance, high performance and equity levels are a consequence of dynamic learning systems where highly qualified and responsible professionals produce these results for themselves. These relationships of responsibility, cooperation and trust, allow Finland's systemic leadership to follow common strategic orientations while responding to local specificities.

Source: Hargreaves and Fink (2008[31]) Distributed leadership: democracy or delivery?

Divisions of responsibility between central government, local governing authorities, and schools in policy making is an ongoing question for education systems. In a recent survey about education policy priorities, OECD member countries highlighted the need for clarification of responsibilities as a one pressing issue. Responsibilities broadly included decision-making about teachers hires, salary increases, school budgets and curricular content (OECD, 2016[32]). As shown in the figure below, between 2008 and 2019, this policy priority was identified in at least 32 education systems, either by the OECD in previous country-based work (26 education systems), by participating education systems (20 education systems), or both (14 education systems). Clarifying this division was considered a priority in three United Kingdom systems, including England, Scotland and Wales (OECD, 2019[33]).

Figure 3.1. Clarifying the division of responsibility between levels of education system, Education Policy Outlook 2019

Number of participating education systems in which the division of responsibility is considered a priority according to either the OECD or the responding education systems.
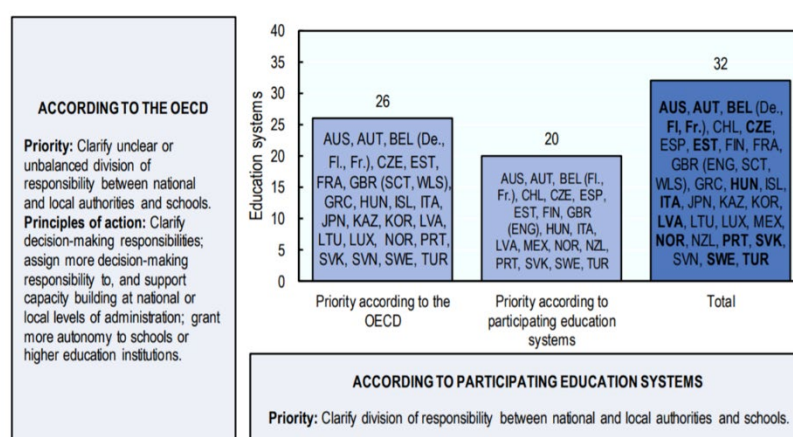
Note: 1. Priority according to the OECD: See OECD (2019[33])Annex A (OECD publications consulted) and Reader's Guide (years covered). 2. Principles of action: Component of a recommendation that draws from international evidence produced on a specific topic, either by the OECD or externally. 3. Priority according to participating education system: Based on responses to Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Surveys 2013 and 2016-17, although responses for Austria, Belgium (Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities), Italy, Kazakhstan, Spain and Sweden are based on the Education Policy Outlook (EPO) Country Profiles published during 2017 and 2018. Responses given during the validation processes for all education systems in 2019 are also included (see the Reader's Guide). 4. Comparing previous OECD analysis and country responses: Education systems highlighted in bold are those where the policy priority was identified by both the OECD and the education system.

Source: OECD (2019[33])https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ad56e-en

The stakeholders interviewed noted that a shared responsibility of CfE has yet to be reached at the system level. To the OECD team's question "who owns CfE?" stakeholders not only signalled their sense of shared ownership, they also highlighted its misalignment with the distribution of responsibilities. CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with only some schools having complete ownership while others lacked confidence and empowerment. The general perspective was that too many stakeholders claimed ownership of CfE, on the one hand, and that the actual responsibilities that come with such ownership were unclear, on the other.

> *"At the beginning, it seemed like everybody wanted to produce their own perception of what CfE was, how it should be delivered, instead of having one. There was too many chiefs and not enough Indians."*

> *"It has to be a collaborative ownership but at the moment, there is too much political ownership, which is disturbing."*

> *"We never managed whole ownership of the CfE system completely, partly because we never got the metrics right for CfE success"* (OECD interviews, 2020[16])

Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success, in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum. Along with trust, transparency is essential to inspire ownership and support sustained implementation (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[29]). Opacity of responsibilities can harm CfE to the extent that it can be difficult for stakeholders to address the relevant interlocutors. As a result, schools' needs might go unaddressed or alternatives to the system in place might be found, which contributes again to the confusion of roles and responsibilities.

The CfE-related responsibilities of different nature – policy governance, political responsibility, everyday implementation – are described on paper, but the OECD team noted a lack of clarity in their definition and distribution between stakeholders in practice. In practice, this lack of clarity can be noted at almost all levels of the education system. Stakeholders met by the OECD team highlighted the duplication of functions between different groups. They also emphasised a need for clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each actor and their boundaries, especially between ES and SQA, RICs and local authorities, and between schools, local authorities and central government (when it comes to curriculum design) (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). Parliamentary enquiries conducted in 2017 looked into the roles of key education bodies, with a specific attention to the link between their overall role in education and their responsibilities in CfE implementation. The enquiries found, for instance, that the distribution of responsibilities between Education Scotland and the Scottish government in the different areas of development and implementation of CfE required more clarity. Response to the enquiry included a commitment by the Cabinet Secretary to undertake a review of the issue (The Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee, 2017[34]).

Uncertainty lied as well in the distribution of CfE-related responsibilities between local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives (RICs). The 32 local authorities and their Directors of Education have statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and its quality. Local authorities take part in CfE developments at national level and support implementation at school cluster or neighbourhood level in various forms. Established in 2017/2018, RICs intend to promote local authorities' collaboration, thus increasing their reach and effectiveness in support of schools, and to work from a meso-level to build capacity in teachers and curriculum leadership across the system. This initiative was launched in part in response to OECD recommendations made in 2015 to "strengthen the professional leadership of CfE and the 'middle'" and "develop a coherent strategy for building teacher and leadership social capital" (OECD, 2015[30]). A full review of RICs' performance is expected to report in 2021. In general, the practitioners interviewed by the OECD either had difficulties identifying the responsibilities of local authorities compared to that of RICs, or they were not aware of RIC's role altogether:

> *"If you ask most teachers and head teachers across Scotland, they don't see what RICs are about. The RICs discuss a lot, but between other players, of school improvement. It is a nice idea, but not adding much for practitioners. They forgot that local collaboration happens at local level, and that the funds used for RICs would be much more useful at local" (OECD interviews, 2020[16])*

In some instances, however, anecdotal evidence reported to the OECD shows that RICs hold potential to increase collaboration across local authorities, as some have already achieved greater and needed collaboration:

> *"For instance [a particular RIC] has provided great support for schools to ask pupils what they want every year and use that to plan their curriculum areas and industry partnerships to offer greater choice in a cohesive manner through the eight local authorities" (OECD interviews, 2020[16])*

The responsibilities assumed by local authorities vary significantly across Scotland, and similarly for Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), which accentuates the lack of readability of the system around CfE. The majority of legal responsibility for education sit with local authorities. Theoretically, such a system can help in the context of a curriculum policy that, like CfE, seeks flexibility to best answer students' needs, while not letting full responsibility rely on schools alone. However, the variability observed in local authorities' approaches mean that decisions that one school leader has the power to make in a given local authority can be taken by the local authority itself elsewhere in Scotland. As highlighted in both OECD interviews and other reports, this participates in the lack of transparency of the system for teachers, school leaders and parents (Scottish Government, 2017[35]).

> *Education is devolved to local authorities. So the government sets the objective, but the strategy to achieve it is up to local authorities, who all have their own understanding, which often result in very different strategies. So teachers themselves have to interpret their local authority's strategy to deliver." (OECD interviews, 2020[16])*

Over the last few decades, many OECD countries have decentralised control of their education systems, giving schools and local school authorities greater autonomy to respond more directly to citizens' needs. Yet ministries of education remain responsible for ensuring high-quality education for all. Traditional forms of accountability, based on a vertical hierarchy between lower decentralised levels and central ministries, are increasingly being complemented by new forms of accountability that involve the voices of more stakeholders. The most successful systems are able to constructively combine the multiple sources of information to ensure adequate transparency and adherence to achievement goals as well as reflect broad societal aims for education (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[29]).

The case of Sweden's shift of education decision making responsibilities to the municipal level in the early 1990s speaks of the importance of clarifying responsibilities among stakeholders. The reform increased municipal autonomy and devolved virtually all responsibility regarding education to the municipal governance structures, in a system with a strong tradition of vertical accountability. However, lacking a clear understanding of new responsibilities and roles to be played by local stakeholders, municipalities did not change their processes as envisioned. Instead, municipalities generated a variety of different structures and strategies for educational governance, which inhibited mutual learning and were often unsuited to internal evaluation and reacting to local demands (OECD, 2015) (Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[29]).

One key area in which school practitioners wish there was more transparency on responsibilities is in professional learning and support for curriculum making. Somme opportunities are offered through Education Scotland and the RICs, as well as through local authorities' own support strategies, but teachers also seek opportunities via national professional associations (such as EIS and GTCS), and programmes with universities, private foundations, or selective professional networks (such as BOCSH). Although there are many opportunities for development, they depend most often on teachers' own knowledge and research of the offer. Repeated requests by practitioners were made during interviews with the OECD team for more clarity on providers of quality support for curriculum making, and a more streamlined offer (OECD interviews, 2020[16]).

Inherited from the intense involvement of stakeholders in Scotland, a significant number of bodies, committees and other councils are involved with the implementation of and advising on CfE, including the Scottish Education Council (SEC), Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB), Strategic Board for Teacher Education, and International Council of Education Advisors (see Table). Overall, these platforms for stakeholder engagement contribute to creating confusion and slow process around CfE. The OECD team interviewed representatives of key bodies and consulted their meeting minutes available online, to understand how the various bodies, and especially the SEC and CAB, contribute to CfE implementation.

The SEC is the main forum for oversight of education improvement since 2017 who aims to provide strategic advice to Ministers on education improvement; and to lead and support collaboration between system leaders and key stakeholders to deliver education. The SEC links up with the Curriculum and Assessment Board and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education; and is informed by the International Council of Education Advisers. The CAB is the main forum for oversight of curriculum and assessment activity in Scotland since 2017, which oversees and leads the curriculum and assessment policy framework in Scottish education; considers actions needed to ensure CfE delivers for all, It supports the SEC but is directly accountable to Scottish Ministers. It replaced former CfE management groups and is chaired jointly by the Director of Learning, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, and members include teachers' professional associations, colleges, universities, scholars, parent associations, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), community learning and development (CLD) representatives. Both bodies were praised for opening a wider channel of communication between the Scottish Government and national agencies, and stakeholders. The CAB also successfully provided a few actionable input, including the drafting and publishing of the "refreshed CfE narrative" in 2019, following OECD recommendations (OECD, 2015[30]).

In the case of the bodies mentioned above, their respective mandate and relationships to each other are defined, but clear processes to organise their interactions and the outcomes from the various groups'

actions are amiss. The role of SEC as the overarching body was questioned during OECD interviews, contrasting the willingness to embody a partnership approach to education policymaking and its ability to translate policy in practical terms, with a purported lack of innovative thinking and imbalance between its members (Humes, 2020[8]). In spite of the Curriculum and Assessment Board's (CAB) achievements, its members themselves acknowledged being uncertain about the role of CAB in relation to other stakeholders, and about their own role on the Board (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). The communication between CAB and SEC was reportedly limited, with little time granted to discussing each other's input and no clear sign of action following presentation of CAB papers to SEC, for instance (Scottish Education Council (SEC), 2017-2019[36]).

There are several reasons that could be noted for the lack of clarity among Scottish stakeholders' responsibilities. First, sometimes the bodies and institutions recently created to evolve with CfE policy took time to establish their role and find their voice in an already crowded system. The examples of the Curriculum Assessment Board and the Scottish Education Council, highlighted above, can in part be explained by the fact that both bodies were established in 2017, in replacement of – but with different mandates than – previous bodies, such as the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board and supporting structure. And although Education Scotland was not restructured for CfE specifically, the addition of inspection duties, and of supporting leadership development and regional working in 2017, might participate in the difficulties to identify and fulfil the institution's remit.

Second, instances were reported to the OECD team of entities who took on responsibilities de facto because they had resources to respond to stakeholders' demands at the time they formulated them, even if such responsibilities might have been beyond their official mandate. Such shift is illustrated for instance in the fact that resources produced by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) have remained the primary reference for teachers in upper secondary education (senior phase), before resources produced by other bodies with statutory responsibility for curriculum support. As confided by some practitioners, secondary schools tend to give priority to information and guidance on examinations coming from the SQA over other CfE-related guidance. The SQA produced detailed guidance as part of the development of updated qualifications (2012-2016), when CfE was still in the early years of its implementation. The teaching profession was adjusting to its new role in curriculum making; the balance between schools' autonomy in curriculum making and central support and guidance was not yet found; and national agencies as well as local authorities only been able to develop few resources to support curriculum making. The challenge was especially significant in secondary schools, where the new CfE framework required learning to go beyond preparation for national qualifications. The teaching profession, seeking guidance to develop their curricula, turned to SQA's high-quality resources which provide for each qualification a detailed course content, coursework, assessment structure and example of teaching resources in open share (see national qualifications pages on the (Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), 2020-2021[37])). Irrespective of the quality of the resources, their use as primary coursework expanded the role of SQA (OECD interviews, 2020[16]).

A third reason why the distribution of responsibility is somewhat blurred, is the fact that most top administrative and executive positions in Scotland's education system tend to be held successively by a small number of agents. This tendency is shared with a number of other systems and is especially noticeable in Scotland due to the relatively small size of the education system. This rotation of high-ranking officials between positions in government, administration and agencies can help facilitate the dialogue between institutions, and maintain a continuity sometimes necessary in public policy. It can however, become an issue if this strive for dialogue and continuity cultivates a single perspective on education and prevents creative thinking and constructive challenging from within top decision-making processes (OECD interviews, 2020[16]; Burns, Köster and Fuster, 2016[34]). Although this might contribute to inter-organisational relations, it has been raised in discussions with the panel as a risk. If only the same people are constantly involved, where do the new ideas and perspectives come from?

Scotland's system is heavily governed relative to its scale and numbers of schools. The multiple layers of governance and additional responsibilities created around CfE can complicate implementation processes by generating additional policy priorities and/or supplementary materials with little co-ordination. The overwhelming number of organisations also draws quite heavily on system leadership capacity, with staff often moving from one organisation to the next or from one division to the next.

Communication for a shared meaning of CfE

Communication is an important channel to develop shared meaning between stakeholders and foster ownership of the policy. There is a wide range of tools for communication in curriculum policy implementation, from official publications on professional or public channels, to dialogue and consultation exercises, and informal discussions through all the initiatives for stakeholder involvement. Developing an effective communication strategy that brings all these tools together is a stepping-stone for engaging stakeholders, and garnering support and clarity around the change.

Scotland succeeded in establishing the education language of CfE over time, which the OECD team could observe while interviewing stakeholders from all levels of the system. The key terms of CfE, from the four capacities to curriculum entitlements, learner progression, and Experiences and Outcomes ("Es and Os") seem to have made their way into daily discussions of education policy makers, teachers and learners alike. This ease with CfE language seems to owe in great part to teachers' discussions around curriculum design within their school and with other units, with learners and their parents. Entry to the profession of teachers who have been taught about CfE during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has also helped install CfE language in schools. It was also helped originally by the ongoing discussions at national level and within professional organisations, as well as by the publication of some common documents, including the "Building the Curriculum" series, the "Refreshed curriculum narrative" and local authorities' own support document for schools.

By establishing a specific language, Scotland set the conditions necessary for stakeholders to develop a shared meaning around CfE. Generally, the key terms of CfE seem well understood by the education community, and especially in use by teachers and learners in Broad General Education. The OECD team also noted a clear willingness in teachers and schools' collaboration efforts to guarantee that their understanding of CfE terms, especially of CfE levels and benchmarks, were the same across the system. Practitioners mentioned several ways in which they communicated and collaborated with teachers and other experts, including schools' own initiatives, local authority and sometimes, RIC support, and organised professional networks. These types of collaborative structures help develop collective sense-making and can further support the curriculum implementation since they allow for discussion on the outcomes of curriculum, continuous feedback and knowledge-sharing, reduce stakeholders' anxiety and facilitate the shared interpretation and contribute to building curriculum coherence (Pietarinen, Pyhältö and Soini, 2017[38]).

Within a national framework, CfE allows for flexibility in school curricula, so it was pivotal to ensure a shared understanding of CfE vision and the policy objectives, which seemed understood by the stakeholders the OECD team. This is not an easy task, as evidence point to a number of instances where definitions and understandings differed within education systems. Stakeholders in education reform need a shared knowledge and understanding of the challenges they are seeking to address and the meaning of the different facets or tools of the reform (Kania and Kramer, 2011[43]; Penuel et al., 2011[44]). Even well-recognised key terms are not always understood in the same way. For instance, the Pupil Premium evaluation in the United Kingdom (England) noted that each school worked according to its own definition of educational disadvantage. Developing modalities for ensuring that policies are well understood and not taking for granted that understanding of phenomena and specific challenges will be the same across the system can help avoid problems in implementation processes (OECD, 2018[14]).

Effective policy implementation requires having shared values and a shared mission, as it can foster the collaborative processes essential for success (Huffman, 2003[39]; Innes and Booher, 2018[40]). In many school systems, this may require a greater focus on long-term goals in school systems in order to meet the immediate challenges a reform may bring (Duckworth, Quinn and Seligman, 2009[41]). In addition, regardless of the level of decentralisation of a system, national leadership to "co-ordinate through partnership", by developing clear guidelines and goals and providing feedback on progress, remains very important to support stakeholders in implementation processes (Burns and Köster, 2016[42]).

One issue acknowledged by stakeholders, is that communication around CfE has become confusing and unhelpful (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). The documentation originally aimed to clarify CfE grew quite significantly, reaching what was sometimes referred to as "the 20 000 pages" of CfE. In part due to a willingness to support schools as they developed their curriculum, many entities including government, national agencies and local authorities published guidance and information about CfE until 2015, sometimes re-interpreting elements and creating possible confusion for teachers and learners (Scottish Government, 2019[47]). The constant production and recycling of documentation was often described as "overwhelming" by the practitioners it is designed to support, and as "confused" or "hard to find" by the parents and learners it is supposed to guide (OECD interviews, 2020[16]). Surveying the documentation available on the websites of Education Scotland, the Scottish Government, local authorities and partners gave a similar impression to the OECD team. Sustaining effective and constructive communication is difficult, especially about a curriculum designed by schools, but it is possible to design and follow a communication strategy that helps implementation. The example of Wales' successful communication strategy around its new curriculum policy is enlightening (Box).

Box 3.4. An effective communication strategy around the Curriculum for Wales

The new Curriculum for Wales 2022 is the cornerstone of the country's efforts to turn its education system from a performance-driven education with a narrow focus, to an education led by commonly defined, learner-centred purposes. It is embedded in "Education in Wales: Our National Mission", a plan for 2017-21 which presents the national vision for education and calls for all children and young people to achieve the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Wales' success in mobilising all key education stakeholders for its reform agenda is due, at least in part, to the active communication strategy the Welsh Government and some of the middle tier actors have consistently adopted. The brand "Our National Mission" was developed and associated terms such as "transformational curriculum" and "enabling objectives" have effectively brought coherence and clarity to the development of the education reform journey, laying some strong basis for stakeholders to make this mission their own.

The Directorate's communication strategy used a variety of channels online, on paper and live. The Minister held Question & Answer sessions, was consistently present at events, along with the Directorate which was also active on social media, maintained a blog to help stakeholders keep up with the reform, and worked with designers to make the published content easier to read. A constant presence of key figures such as the Minister and practitioners from all parts of Wales also helped disseminate the message. Careful monitoring of discussions both online and during events allowed the communication strategy to be adjusted, to clarify some issues with the curriculum policy, and debunk some of the myths through a variety of channels.

Source: OECD 2020 Wales

In 2016, Education Scotland published a "Statement for practitioners" and took down many of the documentation then online on different website, as an attempt to streamline the CfE framework (Education

Scotland, 2016[46]). The effort continued with the "Refreshed curriculum narrative" published in 2019 by the Scottish Government and intending to do away with the "technical jargon" that is not understood consistently. Stakeholders appreciated both efforts but remained careful on their effectiveness for clarity. For instance, the refreshed curriculum narrative was a welcome initiative but did not seem to address perceived ambiguities in the overall education mission, and received little attention from stakeholders among all other policy documents.

Stakeholders qualified parts of the CfE language as "technical jargon" which had lost educational meaning and lent itself to interpretation. Often, the issue for an effective communication is not in publishing long documents repeating the curriculum framework or developing each aspects separately. It is rather about going back to the meaning behind the words and guaranteeing that all stakeholders give the same meaning to key CfE words such as "benchmarks" and "interdisciplinary learning". Although discussions about curriculum and policy should not turn into semantic debates, the choice of words is key important. If in the future, the CfE framework was to evolve to respond to needs, collaboration with scholars and practitioners would be desirable at the time of designing communication. Absence of consensus on educational terms and underlying values concerning education would make systematic improvement of curriculum difficult (Benavot, 2011[45]). Continuous reference and integration of evidence as part of the dialogue between stakeholders during policy design and implementation can help to build a strong and informed consensus on the path forward. This is particularly vital in situations where stakeholders may have strong a priori beliefs tied both to their identities and experiences (Burns and Köster, 2016[42]).

Conclusion

This chapter considered the stakeholder engagement needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE. Stakeholder engagement at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence. Significant efforts were made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which contributed to successes with CfE. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE and the communication and development of a shared language created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework, through curriculum delivery and policy changes.

Several challenges inherent to stakeholder engagement around CfE where highlighted, however. First, there is a gap between the seemingly intense involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the system, and the confidence they have in their effective influence on decision-making. Decision-makers should earn back and nurture stakeholders' trust so their engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation. Especially, two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and their consistence with the use of stakeholders' input. Second, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with too many stakeholders claiming ownership of CfE while not necessarily fulfilling the responsibilities that come with such ownership were unclear. Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success, in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum. Third, communication around CfE remains confused, which can hinder implementation by leaving CfE open to wide interpretations and overwhelm schools, learners and parents.

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4 Coherent environment for CfE implementation

This chapter analyses how elements of the policy environment work to support – or hinder – the implementation of CfE in Scotland. Central to the aspirations of CfE are the capacities of teachers to be curriculum makers, and of school leaders to lead the process of curriculum in their schools. Much progress has been made in developing and supporting this capacity, but this work has become more challenging for schools given the need to respond to multiple new initiatives at local and national level. In spite of repeated attempts to reform qualifications, misalignment between the aspirations of CfE and the system of qualifications has become a significant barrier to the implementation of CfE in the secondary sector. Work remains on getting the policies in place that deliver the right balance between CfE autonomy and equity for students, and on aligning and perhaps simplifying the many frameworks and strategies in the busy policy landscape. A systematic review cycle for CfE – instead of the piecemeal approach currently in place – could be useful in moving to a more proactive and coherent policy environment.

The policy environment for curriculum implementation

The policy design and stakeholder engagement dimensions of the OECD framework for education policy implementation focus on issues where policymakers have direct discretion upon, and can act to facilitate curriculum implementation. Contextual or environmental factors, which condition stakeholders' agency and ability to implement a reform, are equally important but sometimes difficult to adjust in the short term. Part of the policy maker's task is to consider them when designing the policy and when supporting the policy into implementation as they will greatly influence the change process.

Traditional understandings of successful policy implementation as fidelity to an intended reform required implementers of the policy to be recipients of policy decisions. Implementation was viewed as a straightforward technical process and implementation 'failures' in education were usually blamed on teachers and school leaders who were not doing what they were mandated to do by policy-makers. CfE from the beginning was a policy that implied significant shifts in the culture and structures of Scottish education to create a conducive policy environment to support a new vision of curriculum and of teachers as curriculum-makers.

This chapter considers three major issues of the Scottish policy environment, and the degree to which they support or hinder CfE. Significant progress has been made towards system leadership for CfE and leadership capacity for curriculum change, and for creating policies that enhance CfE but some issues remain; policy coherence around CfE, and especially regarding assessment and evaluation; and system governance.

Flexibility management: the challenge for teachers and school leaders

The success of curriculum innovations such as CfE, that require more of teachers than fidelity to centrally prescribed programmes of study, relies heavily on the capacity, culture and status of the teaching profession and the quality of school leadership (Gouedard et al. 2020). Systems that promote such local innovation and strive for the empowerment of system actors – including learners, require strong system leaders to drive a culture that is at once empowered and accountable, and who can present a compelling case for the education system to the media, the politicians and to the general public.

The flexibility and autonomy afforded to teachers and schools by CfE is highly valued by the teaching profession, and appreciated by parents and other stakeholders. In turn, most stakeholders interviewed by the OECD team saw teachers as highly qualified professionals able to realise CfE's ambitions, and agreed that significant progress had been made towards CfE implementation. There was positive feedback on the professional support provided to date to teachers and school leaders in support of CfE. Stakeholders endorsed the commitment in CfE to meet the needs of learners and the flexibility afforded to schools to respond to local needs and personalise curriculum for learners. The OECD team also observed how leaders and schools used curriculum flexibility to deliver creative responses to the challenges posted by rural and island locations through the use of consortia of schools and technology to support the principle of curriculum breadth for students (OECD interviews, 2020[1]).

However, CfE flexibility canalso be a double-edged sword: flexibility inevitably gives rise to variation, and in discussions, the degree of variation in how CfE was experienced by learners across Scotland was a

concern. For system level leaders, this concern was about a variation in quality across the school system. The OECD project on Education 2030 shows that many systems depend on local leadership for the design of curriculum at the school level to meet the needs of learners, and support this flexibility with an appropriately robust evaluation framework (OECD, 2020[2]). For others who expressed a concern about variability, the issue was the degree of variability in how the curriculum was organised, and consequences for student outcomes, and importantly, system equity.

New research conducted with head teachers in Scotland as part of a Nuffield project highlights the degree of variation in how the curriculum is structured for students in secondary schools for example. The research found that 82% of schools organise this phase of schooling as a 3+3+3 model as envisaged by CfE. But 18%, including all the Independent Schools in the sample, maintain the old 2+2+2 model (Shapira et al., 2021[3]). The same study found considerable differences in the year of schooling when students make their first subject choice. In the sample of head teachers, 14% reported that this happened in S1, 51% in S2 and 34% in S3. Give the well-documented relationship between subject choice and educational outcomes in secondary schools, variation of this scale would be a cause for concern in any system. For Scotland it is particularly worrying given the importance of subject choice in determining entry to Higher Education. A study comparing differences in entry to HE in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland showed that for Scotland, inequalities in entry to HE explained by subject choice in Scotland, whereas in Ireland (where students take fewer subjects) they are more closely associated with academic performance (Ianelli, Smyth and Klein, 2016[4]). These particular variations are associated with some of the assessment and qualifications issues identified in the review; but they are also a reminder that when schools exercise their much valued 'flexibility to meet the needs of students' it may not always work in the interests of their students in the longer term nor may it serve system goals towards equity.

In discussions with school leaders and teachers about how decisions about curriculum are made at school level, the needs of the students and the competence of teachers and school leadership were always referenced. But they also identified other factors. The role of local authorities in setting priorities for schools and the potentially constraining roles of locally mandated approaches and initiatives were identified as significant factors for school-level curriculum planning and innovation. On the other hand, the scale and type of support for professional learning in schools where this was provided by a local authority was identified as a positive support for local empowerment and we heard many positive examples of this taking place across Scotland.

Similar contrasting views of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives were also expressed. For some school leaders these were seen as additional layer of 'the hierarchy', 'another initiative to deal with' or 'some other group to report to'. Others took a more positive view seeing them as an important support for local empowerment, an 'important platform to share good practice', and potentially a 'successful meso system' to support CFE work in schools.

Teachers and school leaders may be limited by other contextual factors. Some recent research about the implementation of health and wellbeing in CfE points to constraints experienced by teachers, for example, especially those working in schools serving high poverty communities (Hardley, Gray and McQuillan, 2020[5]) For teachers in the secondary system, the biggest constraint appears to be the spectre of qualifications (see discussion below).

In common with other education systems, concern for the wellbeing of children and young people in society has led to new pressures and expectations for schools (OECD, 2018[6]). Recognition that students who feel well learn well is widely shared and schools have an important role, not just in responding to the wellbeing concerns of society, but to actively promoting and supporting student wellbeing. In discussions with the review team it was evident that education stakeholders, system leaders, and school leaders, teachers and learners placed a high priority on wellbeing and saw the flexibility of CfE as central to school efforts to support and enhance it. This was particularly strong in the primary sector where the focus on pupil wellbeing was shared by the children who met the OECD team. CfE affords schools the flexibility to

focus on and promote wellbeing but in some discussions, school-level actors noted that the complexity of some wellbeing issues - anxiety and other mental health concerns – were often beyond the capacity of schools to respond. This was even more evident during the COVID pandemic.

While wellbeing and the challenges of supporting the wellbeing of adolescents did feature in discussions with students, teachers and school leaders of post-primary schools, these discussions were more likely to move quickly to matters of qualifications, subject choice, and transition to the senior phase. The review team was struck by the absence of any explicit references to CfE from many of the discussions with post-primary leaders, with the notable exception of the four capacities which were consistently mentioned as overarching aspirations for schools although it was equally notable that 'successful learners' was given the highest priority.

Thus the autonomy promoted by CfE depends not only on the capacity of the teachers and school leaders to respond to that autonomy with expertise in curriculum making. It also depends on the interaction between individual actors and institutions, and on local and other pressures placed on schools by the policy context and environment, the social and cultural context of the school and wider societal wellbeing of children and young people. The autonomy of schools when it comes to CfE is a constrained autonomy that is affected by the external context; those constraints are not the same for all schools or sectors of the system.

Moderating and making sense of that policy context and environment for schools, managing constraints, and protecting that autonomy is part of the work of school leadership in the Scottish system. Scotland has prioritised the support and development of school leadership as a policy goal, and the OECD team had discussions with some outstanding school leaders. It was notable in those discussions that school leaders see their role as interpreting the policy context for their school to ensure that the school and the teachers are protected from policy incoherence and overload. Leaders see themselves as filtering what was relevant and appropriate for the school from the proliferation of policy initiatives at local and national level. School leaders appear to have strong local networks, particularly across local authorities and are committed to the communities and regions where they work.

The agency and empowerment of teachers to make decisions in the interests of the children and young people in their classrooms is highly valued in Scotland. An evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations of a review of teacher education in 2010 found evidence of progress in four areas. It found that teachers were more engaged with professional learning, and had a greater sense of ownership of their own career-long professional learning. It noted that there was a greater focus on the impact of teacher professional learning on pupils with consideration of the needs of pupils informing decisions on professional learning. Notably for CfE implementation it concluded that there had been a cultural shift towards more professional dialogue at school level, and it found that there was a greater willingness than previously to try new teaching practices (Black, Bowen and Murray, 2015[7]). Interestingly, this evaluation identified two particular challenges for teacher professional learning. The first was the practical one of securing supply teachers for schools. The second was the array of 'competing national priorities' that colonised teacher professional learning. This 'competition' was consistently raised with the OECD team as impacting on teacher and leader agency at school level. Managing those competing demands continues to drain the energy and capacity of teachers and school leaders; freeing up some of that capacity to provide more leadership for and in schools, particularly to support CfE across all sectors of the school system should be an important priority.

A promise to align assessment and qualifications to CfE

Building The Curriculum 5 (2010), from the series of CfE documents, proposed a comprehensive framework for 3-18 for assessment across the education system as part of CfE (Figure in Chapter 2). This representation of the framework has been accessed by systems and researchers around the world as an

exemplar of an assessment framework with a clear focus on the centrality of the learner, and an articulation of the different purposes of assessment – again prioritising the focus on student learning. The role of teachers in the assessment process is notable in the framework and the document also stresses the need for a programme of continuous professional development (CPD) to support teachers' assessment capacity to assess with confidence and consistency. The document acknowledges the importance of qualifications in the senior phase but notes that the 'next generation of qualifications within CfE' will build on the same curriculum priorities and serve the four capacities of CfE. The importance of transitions in that context is also stressed – transition from BGE, and transition to further and higher education. The framework promises much in support of CfE; there is strong alignment of principles and focus. Arguably, however, the promise has yet to be delivered.

Building the Curriculum 5 is not a single document, but a set of documents that provide additional guidance on different aspects of the framework – reporting, standards, recognising achievement, and quality assurance and moderation. An analysis of these documents shows that their focus is on the BGE rather than on the senior phase, and that the guidance is at a high level, with considerable local autonomy proposed (in line with other aspects of CfE).

In the decade since the publication of the assessment framework and supporting guidance, one of the most notable successes has been the realisation of that commitment to the professionalism and agency of teachers in the assessment process. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) sustained that commitment; assessment is one of the improvement drivers, but the judgement of teachers is identified as central to that process. The new census-based standardised assessments (SNSA) are presented as low-stakes with the aim of providing teachers with diagnostic information on children's literacy and numeracy to support teachers' assessment and planning for effective teaching. In avoiding the pitfalls of high-stakes testing in the school system, Scotland has positioned teacher's professional assessment work as pivotal for the quality of student learning. The controversies around the P1 tests (reviewed following their first round of implementation) focused on the appropriateness of tests of this kind for children in P1, how the data might be used at the national level and notably, the suitability of tests of this kind for the play-based curriculum advocated by CfE for this stage of learning.

As the SNSA continues to be rolled out, Scotland now has a well-developed and widely shared view of the centrality of teachers in the assessment process; the agency of teachers in assessment, and the focus on providing teachers with tools (including census tests) to support their judgement is a particular strength of the system, and one that is internationally regarded. The development of teacher assessment literacy through CPD and a new focus on assessment in teacher education programmes has resulted in a greater confidence in teachers in their own assessment practice. That level of professionalism was striking in discussions with teachers (OECD interviews, 2020[1]). The review of the P1 test also noted that the majority of teachers felt prepared to use the data, and found the training useful, even if they were less positive about the quality or usefulness of the test data presented to them (Reedy, 2019[8]).

Within BGE there is an explicit attempt to align curriculum and assessment through the use of levels and, since 2016, the benchmarks to support teacher judgement. Originally called "CfE benchmarks", these are now widely referred to as simply the "benchmarks", and are described as the articulation of the national standards for each level (OECD interviews, 2020[1]). While the addition to the benchmarks was broadly welcomed in the system they pose both curriculum and assessment challenges. As a tool to support teacher judgement, the benchmarks may be useful; however, despite explicit instructions to teachers and schools not to use them in this way, there is a real risk that they become the proxy curriculum– a checklist of content to be covered to meet the expectations of a particular level.

While the levels and benchmarks are described as tools to support planning for learning and guides for teacher judgement, they are also the basis on which achievement is to be reported nationally; thus the reports on the NIF for example, reference aggregated data reported from schools on the percentage of students achieving each level as reported by schools. While this data is interesting, reporting it on a

national scale, and tracking small changes in percentages as evidence of improvement or otherwise, may not be giving the system the robust data needed to monitor student achievement.

The OECD team was struck by the contestation around data on student learning more generally and by the absence of authoritative longitudinal data (outside the data collected on qualifications) to inform decision-making at system level. The public in Scotland has access to lots of data about the education system, details on the numbers of students attaining CfE levels and qualifications at each level of the framework of qualifications, and NIF evidence and case studies of school improvement. This commitment to data transparency at every level of the system is admirable. But better quality data might better serve public debate and political decision-making.

Robust data on student achievement are scarce, although progress has been made with SNSA, until the senior phase and existing data raise questions about how it is used, by whom and for what purposes. Reporting on the numbers of students achieving at particular levels may not be as useful as more detailed data on content of levels accomplished at the national scale. Some observed that it may be giving rise to an impression of a rather static system or one that is not improving. CfE is being stressed by initiatives designed to purportedly 'drive improvement' but the robustness of improvement data does not appear evident yet. There is general confusion as to what data counts when it comes to student learning. Given CfE's focus on the four capacities, the absence of data on how well students are achieving in three of these – the capacities beyond "successful learner", harder to assess – is also noteworthy. The OECD team received much anecdotal evidence about how CfE appears to be supporting and developing the four capacities during interviews with learners, their parents, teachers and system leaders; but beyond that, there has been no attempt to measure whether the aspirations articulated 20 years ago are being realised.

To support the implementation of CfE and to ensure that the process of curriculum review and development nationally and at school level, robust data is needed at system level on how well children are learning and progressing. Scotland is in need of a' single source of truth' approach to student achievement; a step towards this would greatly enhance the system's overall stability, and support measured responses to external system data such as PISA, which only provide a picture of performance for 15 year olds, not capturing those in Senior Phase. The NIF contains data that aims to measure progress of the system at the national level. The framework and its data does not appear yet to be well supported across Scotland as providing a full picture of education system performance, or on its progress or full breath of the richness of CfE. . This leaves the system vulnerable to reliance on international assessments such as PISA for system intelligence that should be drawn from data collected and reported regularly at national level.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), in collaboration with stakeholders, designed new national qualifications to align them with the CfE and to certify learners' achievement in developing the four capacities as well as the skills for learning, life and work. The new national courses and qualifications aimed to provide high standards and a formal acknowledgement of learners' achievements, while ensuring at the same time a continuity with the breadth and depth of learning sought at earlier levels of CfE. The qualifications were first introduced in 2013/2014, then revised in 2016/2017. In line with efforts to adopt a broader definition of educational success, the availability of vocational qualifications and the foundation apprenticeships emerging from the DYW initiative are also an important development, and appear to be widely welcomed by stakeholders in the system even if implementation is at an early stage (Scottish Government, 2020[9]).

It would seem the ambition for reformed national qualifications to align with CfE was not delivered to date, in spite of the early commitment in Building the Curriculum 5, and of SQA's efforts in the matter. One of the clearest indicators of a misaligned assessment and evaluation system is when stakeholders say 'we don't want to do this but the examination/test process makes us do it'. The OECD team heard this many times in the course of discussions of CfE, especially with stakeholders from the secondary system (OECD interviews, 2020[1]). There may well be historical reasons why the qualifications did not develop as originally planned as part of a unified 3-18 curriculum; but the current two stage secondary phase that has evolved

is now the most significant barrier to the implementation of CfE for learners in secondary school. Indeed, the backwash from the misalignment in secondary stage is even being felt in primary schools.

The disconnect between the qualifications tests and CfE's philosophy hinder the relevance of the first and the power of the second. Many stakeholders interviewed expressed doubts as to how well the public understands and value of the greater diversity in qualifications help realise CfE's ambitions. They agreed, on the other hand, that there is one accepted and widely understood measure of success in the senior phase – the attainment of five Higher qualifications. The OECD team noted that in discussions on the senior phase, and much of secondary education, the 4 CfE capacities are displaced by 'the 4 Highers' as the purpose of curriculum at this stage. Notably, learners, particularly those who had attained their Highers and are now working towards Advanced Highers commented that they had set aside any aspirations towards the 4 capacities to undertake the 'two-term dash' for their Higher qualification, and the rote learning needed to attain these qualifications.

The final stage of secondary education poses some complex policy challenges. A recent review commissioned to support reform in that phase of education in the Republic of Ireland examined trends across nine jurisdictions (O'Donnell, 2018[10]). While there were some common features identified – explicit attempts to integrate vocational studies into what have been traditional academic tracks for example – the differences between systems at this stage are striking, reflecting national priorities for education as well as for economic and social development among other contextual factors. Because this phase is the 'frontier' that leads to economic, civic and social agency for learners, it is subject to the greatest level of public and media interest and this interest focuses in particular on the assessment arrangements for this, the final stage of schooling.

Designing an assessment system that can serve the multiple purposes of qualifications at this stage is challenging and generally involves trade-offs between purposes. Not all can be given the same priority. But qualification arrangements should at least not actively undermine the aims and purposes of the wider system. Is this happening in Scotland? The OECD heard mixed views on this. While on the one hand there is general acceptance that there is more work needed to better align qualifications in the senior phase, there was little appetite for 'more reform'. The impact of Covid on examinations across Europe has given new impetus to the reform of traditional end of school examinations. The pen and paper format has come under scrutiny, but so too has the degree to which they prepare learners for the uncertainties and challenges ahead. Scotland's early decision not to proceed with the Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021 and to rely instead on teacher judgement of evidence of learner attainment as the basis for these high-stakes award will be important in informing next steps for these awards towards better alignment with CfE.

In a recent address marking the tenth anniversary of his review of teacher education Graham Donaldson suggested that the last decade in Scotland had seen increasing confusion about the role of assessment in student learning. He suggested that Scotland now had a 'confused set of practices' (Donaldson, 2020[11]) The OECD team would extend that analysis to include a somewhat confused set of policies, with some distance to travel to deliver on the promise of the integrated framework proposed in Building the Curriculum 5.

Many systems include the processes of school evaluation in their assessment and evaluation framework, thus connecting the quality of schools with the quality of children's learning and achievements. The Inspectorate in Scotland has a long history of innovating with and for schools, particularly in supporting school self-evaluation. While the role of the Inspectorate is not the focus of this OECD review, the team was struck by the absence of references to Inspection or the Inspectorate in considerations of CfE as a school-led process. The unusual configuration or an embedded, rather than independent, Inspectorate is also noteworthy, particularly in a system where the autonomy of schools in curriculum-making and in planning for teaching and learning is no highly valued. School evaluation and inspection systems are important means of managing the tensions between local flexibility and national consistency, and in recent

years, many systems have moved to more decentralised models of inspections including school self-evaluation, and the development of self-evaluating networks of schools (in particular local authorities for example).

From competing priorities to a more coherent policy ecosystem for CfE

The design of CfE as a framework for learners from the ages of 3 to 18 was innovative for Scotland and visionary for the international community when it emerged in the early 2000s. Almost 20 years later, CfE is still remarkably relevant to Scotland's aspirations to a high-quality, future-oriented education for all its children and young people. The implementation of CfE across schools in those years since its launch depended not only on dedicated support for teachers, leaders and the wider education community. For CfE to be implemented effectively, other policies and structures of the school system needed to evolve alongside to ensure that CfE was not a moment-in-time 'initiative' but a reform that would be embedded and sustained. Scotland has made significant progress towards this kind of policy coherence for CfE. But more work remains.

Among the most notable efforts towards coherence was the positioning of CfE as one of the three supporting pillars of the education system alongside Getting Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, 2006) and the National Improvement Framework (NIF, 2016). The three pillars of support present as a significant and coherent structure – a pillar for what and how children learn (CfE), a pillar to support children's wellbeing (GIRFEC) and a pillar to provide assurance that overall, the system is delivering what it has promised (NIF).

The absence of policy coherence is fragmentation. In fragmented systems potentially high-impact reforms are launched but with a relatively short period of time, they are invisible in schools and classrooms as teachers and school leaders have learned that this 'game-changing' initiative will be followed by another one next year, and in some systems, next month. Scotland's is not a fragmented system, but the OECD analysis identified two particular challenges for CfE coherence.

Discussions with the OECD team identified some initial attempts to support CfE that have, over time, become barriers to implementation. The policy space between the three 'pillars' of Scottish Education (NIF, GIRFEC, CfE) has become crowded with new policies in recent years. Additional policies and initiatives have been introduced such as the Developing the Young Workforce in 2014, the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015, and the Joint Agreement on an Empowered System in 2019. The emergence of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) as part of the education policy landscape since 2015 is also noteworthy. A recent report of Scotland's International Council of Education Advisors noted the efforts made to balance and integrate CfE and NIF without one being 'eclipsed' by the other (Scottish Government, 2020[12]) While this is sage advice, it also points to the challenge faced by school leaders who have to balance competing demands of two 'pillars' both ostensibly sharing the same purposes. The 2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan offers a new 'policy map' of the system with the 'pillars' replaced by 'strategic frameworks' and five of these identified in Figure 4.2. (Scottish Government, 2020[13]). The graphic places the NIF as the central framework; the others as support

Figure 4.1 Relationship between the NIF and the other strategic frameworks in Scottish Education

Source: Scottish Government (2021[14]) Achieving excellence and equity -2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan, https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/12/2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/govscot%3Adocument/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan.pdf

A further – and different – 'map' of the policy environment was offered to the system early in 2021, when Education Scotland published guidance on the empowered system (Education Scotland, 2021[15]) This is not mentioned in the NIF policy map. An empowered system, according to the guidance is where learners, teachers and leaders exercise and take initiative within and beyond the classroom in support of improved outcomes for learners. The empowered system is presented as an eight piece jigsaw with separate guidance documents provided for each partner in the jigsaw to reflect on empowerment in their own context.

For school leaders, teachers and the general public, these moving maps of the policy landscape and the emergence of new or tweaked initiatives and priorities generates a continuum of perception. At one end of this continuum is a dynamic and responsive system focused steadfastly on student learning and improvement; at the other a hyperactive system, driven by political or media criticism.

The challenge of policy coherence and of locating the system on that continuum is not confined to Scotland; many modern education systems suffer from 'initiative overload' as rapid social, technological and economic changes place increasing pressures on schooling at every stage; in countries like Scotland where there is strong public confidence and interest in education these pressures can be particularly acute.

The OECD review team heard a number of system stakeholders including policy-makers, researchers, teachers, school leaders, and parents refer to increasing media hostility towards education in Scotland. For some schools this resulted in press towards conservatism in decision-making to minimise the risk of any controversy. For leaders, it gave rise to a constant concern as to how an action or lack of action might be perceived by the media and increasingly, on social media platforms. This is not a uniquely Scottish experience, but added to the political priority placed on education, it makes for a high-pressure and sometimes hyperactive system, where the policies and initiatives may well be ambitious and well-constructed policies in themselves, but how they work as a policy system is not immediately evident. How they work to support the implementation of CfE is difficult to see.

System governance and the policy cycle

Traditionally, Scotland has seen its education system as a source of national pride and granted great importance to educational issues in the political debate to a degree that would be the envy of many a system. This pride has contributed to the broad commitment to CfE and to Scotland's evident ongoing commitment to improve education in general. The importance afforded to education is also notable in the appreciation that system leaders and stakeholders show for their own role in education, and in the constructive approach that most actors adopt within the numerous governance boards, committees and other advisory groups. The high priority given to education is also reflected in the degree of political debate about education, and the positioning of education as a key priority not just for the Ministry of Education but for all of government. The issue of confused CfE ownership and obscure responsibilities raised before aggravates the effect that the political debate has on CfE, meaning that contestation about CfE is inevitably political and urgent. There is pressure on senior leaders to react quickly to issues and debates.

As a consequence, Scotland's is a busy system and the volume of documentation, policies, reviews, is high and can sometimes be associated with policy overload. The team was struck by the volume of 'guidance' (and subsequent 'clarifications' and 'additional guidance') that streamed from Education Scotland in particular. At one level this is understandable given the extensive remit of Education Scotland. However it may also be indicative of a system in constant 'reactive' mode. The OECD team noted the absence of a policy review cycle – an identified timeline within which issues or concerns about aspects of CfE would be addressed in a process of systematic and scheduled review –which has proven valuable in similar education systems, although it is not present in many.

Such a systematic approach can also ensure that curriculum issues and controversies can be raised but then flagged for inclusion in the next review rather than requiring immediate, and often political, intervention. Recent work by the OECD looking at how different systems manage curriculum decision-making showed that managing the momentum of this process can be challenging. Table 4.1 summarises some of the challenges highlighted by these systems, and the strategies they use to tackle them. A key challenge is to identify a timeframe that is effective for the aspirations and structure of the system. Some countries have found that a ten-year timeframe may give system stability but at the expense of responsiveness. Others, that a process of rolling review can allow for an agile response as issues arise, but in turn generates constant change and updating. For systems that value consensus on curriculum, the time it takes to build consensus can delay much-needed reform (OECD, 2020[16]).

Table 4.1. Challenges and strategies related to decision-making time lag

	Challenge/strategy	Countries/jurisidctions reporting the challenge/strategy
Challenges	Difficulty in building consensus on the direction of curriculum change	Denmark, Korea, Argentina, Viet Nam
	Delays resulting from the time requirement of a rigorous review process	Estonia, Ontario (Canada)
	Limited responsiveness of periodic curriculum renewal cycles	Hungary, Japan, Brazil1, India1
Strategies	Engaging stakeholders to develop shared understanding and ownership of curriculum change	British Columbia (Canada), Ireland, Netherlands, Ontario (Canada), Poland, Scotland (United Kingdom), Sweden, Costa Rica, Poland
	Setting out a vision for the future of education to guide curriculum changes over time	British Columbia (Canada), Norway, Ontario (Canada), Portugal, Russian Federation, Singapore
	Engaging in ad hoc, partial or continuous reform	Denmark, Ireland, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Poland, Portugal, Québec (Canada), Scotland (United Kingdom), Sweden, Turkey, United States1, Hong Kong (China)
	Articulating key curriculum concepts that endure over time	Australia, British Columbia (Canada), Ireland, Japan, Korea, Norway, Québec (Canada), Turkey, Brazil1, China), India1, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Singapore, Viet Nam
	Creating space in the curriculum to accommodate new changes	Australia, Czech Republic, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Québec (Canada), Saskatchewan (Canada), Brazil1
	Using "learning to learn" as the centre of curriculum reform decisions	Finland, New Zealand, Portugal, Hong Kong (China), India
	Assessing the relevance of current curricular content through systemic reviews	Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Ontario (Canada)
	Digitalising the curriculum to facilitate faster change	Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Ontario (Canada), Hong Kong (China)

Note: 1. Responses for these countries/jurisdictions were submitted by independent researchers, not government administrations.
Source: OECD (2020[17]) What students learn matters, https://doi.org/10.1787/d86d4d9a-en

Scotland has not decided how or when it will conduct reviews; to-date, including this one, reviews have been in response to a controversy rather than planned and proactive and they have drawn on expertise external to the system. While external perspectives can be useful from time-to-time building internal system capacity for curriculum review, and trust and confidence in that capacity should now be prioritised for Scotland. A cycle of this kind requires three essential supports. First, it needs the systematic approach to data collection on the impact of curriculum discussed earlier. Second, it needs access to independent research on an ongoing basis. And third, responsibility for the cycle of review needs to assigned to an agency accountable to government and wider stakeholders, that acts as owner and champion for CfE and where accountability for its quality and sustainability rests. Ironically, in Scotland's system of many layers of agencies and organisations, this is a current gap.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the policy environment needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE; not just the kinds of policies needed to enable effective implementation, but the alignment between them that can give teachers and school leaders the agency to design the learning experiences promised for Scotland's children and young people by CfE twenty years ago. The originality of CfE at the time of its development and its continued relevance and influence on the international stage continues to influence international curriculum policy; affording autonomy at school level within a national framework is now

widely used as a curriculum design principle (OECD, 2020[16]). The implementation challenges of these approaches are shared by other systems.

Four challenges for Scotland in ensuring that the policy environment is conducive to the aspirations and implementation of CfE are identified in this chapter. The capacity of teachers and school leaders to be curriculum makers at school level has developed since CfE was introduced, supported by a range of CPD and support materials. The review found that the capacity of school leaders, and elements of system leadership were being constrained by multiple initiatives in a busy local and national policy environment The promise of assessment aligned with CfE has not been fully realised. This gap is the most significant barrier to implementation in the secondary sector with the backwash from qualifications in the senior phase now shaping the experience of learners more than the aspirations of CfE. This alignment challenge extends beyond assessment. While the policy environment is crowded with multiple initiatives, gaps – such as that in assessment for example – remain, and where new polices are introduced (or old ones re-branded) alignment and coherence is a problem. Another notable gap in the policy environment is an established systematic review cycle for CfE supported by robust data and evidence.

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5 Considerations for the next steps of Curriculum for Excellence

This chapter reviews the implementation strategy of the Curriculum for Excellence and provides concrete recommendations for Scotland to consider ten years after the implementation of CfE in schools. It suggests that the next steps for CfE need to focus on students and their learning progress. This implies reviewing how the Curriculum for Excellence is consistently providing learning opportunities all the way through Senior Phase; clarifying ownership of CfE and regularity in responsibilities and in communication; defining a stable institutionalised curriculum review process and an aligned assessment system; and gathering consistent data to monitor progress.

In 2020, Curriculum for Excellence is again at a key moment. The economic situation, the impact of COVID on the society, economy and education, the variable education system performance, together with the 10 year experience with CfE in schools provide a good opportunity to review how the CfE has been implemented and what can be done for it to continue to deliver quality learning for all students across Scotland to be ready for their future.

Curriculum for Excellence was introduced in schools from 2010 to provide a holistic approach to learning, to develop knowledge, skills and attributes together to think critically and adapt to the future. The four purposes of CfE are to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. The ten-year experience provides an opportunity to review CfE and its implementation from a student perspective: how students' progress through the system, especially in the transition from lower secondary into senior phase with CfE.

To understand the implementation of CfE, this chapter explores the approach to implementation and how it has combined different dimensions to drive change across the system. Based on the questions below it provides a set of recommendations for action in the next stages.

- How has CfE been implemented from a student perspective? Is the CfE design working well for all students as they progress and transition through the system?
- How have those shaping CfE been involved and how can they engage most productively to continue delivering the best possible CfE?
- How has the policy environment contributed to CfE reaching all schools consistently?
- Has there been a clear and well-structured implementation strategy to review progress and plan next steps?

An overview of the implementation approach

An implementation strategy refers to the co-ordinated actions taken following an initial decision on the design of a policy for it to become a reality. The policy itself may be defined in a document that provides an overarching vision or in many documents. The implementation strategy needs to be targeted towards action, and can be updated and adapted according to progress made or issues that may arise (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Table 5.1. Developments of CfE (2002-2020)

	Leading implementation process	Policy document/progress
2002	Scottish Government (formerly Scottish Executive)	National Debate on Education: National consultation to determine what was working well and what needed to change in school education.
2003	Scottish Government	Curriculum Review Group established to identify the key principles to be applied in the curriculum redesign for ages 3-18.
2004	Curriculum Review Group together with Scottish Government.	A Curriculum for Excellence published
	Curriculum Review Group	Research and review process by researchers to review existing guidelines and research findings, Focus groups with practitioners and begin the process of developing simpler, prioritised curriculum guidelines
	Scottish Government	Progress and Proposals published Building the Curriculum series begun
2007-2017	CfE Management Board created - curriculum change process	Draft experiences and outcomes published
2008	CfE MB	Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching published

2009	CfE MB	Publication of the new curriculum guidelines
2010	Schools	Implementation of CfE in all schools
2011/12	SQA	Developing new qualifications
2012-2017	CfE Implementation Group created (part of CfE Management Board)	
2014	Scottish Government	Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy
2014	SQA	First Certification of New Nationals 1-5
2015	SQA	First Certification of New Higher
2015	Scottish Government	The Scottish Attainment Challenge
2016	Scottish Government	National Improvement Framework (NIF)
2016	Scottish Government	New Inspection model (NIF)
2016	Scottish Government	Delivering Excellence & Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland published
2016	SQA	First Certification of Advanced Higher
		CfE learning benchmarks
2017	Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB): provide leadership and oversight of curriculum and assessment	
2018		15-24 Learner Journey Review report published
2018		The Scottish Learner Panel created
2019	Scottish Education Council established: provide oversight of improvement in education.	
2019	CBA	Refreshed Curriculum Narrative
2020	Scottish Government – Education Scotland	National E-learning offer (COVID)

Note: Scottish Government (2020[1]) Initial evidence pack

CfE has followed an implementation process of co-design and co-creation with all relevant education stakeholders. Table X provides an overview of the policy developments from an implementation perspective. The co-construction process has been undertaken through boards, such as the initially created Curriculum Review Group. Following the initial design of CfE a Curriculum for Excellence Management Board was created with key education stakeholders who met to review progress from a managerial perspective. The analysis of this group's meeting minutes shows that the discussions consisted mainly in progress updates in the various allocated tasks, but not in detecting challenges in CfE implementation, as maybe the metrics for this had not been integrated into the original design. In 2012, after the implementation of CfE in schools started in 2010, a specific implementation group was created under the CfE Management Board. This group continued with the details of CfE until its dissolution in 2017, when they were replaced by the Curriculum and Assessment Board. This Board meets regularly to review curriculum and assessment progress in relation to CfE and beyond. They undertake analysis, inquiries and provide advice to the Scottish Government on developments.

This CfE implementation process followed a clear path in its inception, with the preparation of all the materials for implementation in schools from 2010 onwards. Shaping and implementing education policy is complex, with changes in governments and governance, to the large number of stakeholders involved and to the long timespan that education policy takes to take root in relation to other public policy spheres (OECD, 2020[2]). As schools had to implement the curriculum, the government published materials and relevant supports according to studies by the CAB or others, such as a large number of independent reviews or inquiries undertaken on specific subjects of the curriculum. For example, analysis of assessment or student choices were requests for further inquiry rather than from an initially planned implementation strategy that could review progress with clear indicators and update or adapt in relation to progress made and challenges found along the way. These were published at later stages, with the

refreshed narrative or the National Improvement Framework (NIF), which have contributed to clarity in the implementation of CfE and of national expectations. In hindsight, and looking forward, the different policies that have been introduced since CfE have complemented some of its initial lack of indicators or information in terms of progress with it. The Learner Journey review is another example, which analysed some of the impact of CfE, and the NIF set the data to understand potential progress with CfE. But the original CfE design was bold and new, and it may have seemed challenging at the time to establish a longer term strategy or the metrics to understand progress in its implementation. During the review meetings, the OECD team heard often that CfE was a philosophy rather than a curriculum policy, and the lack of a clear implementation strategy could have contributed to this thinking.

The CAB and its predecessor, the CfE Management Board, appear to have a role in advising on the implementation strategy. It is unclear, however, whether the Boards have to shape the approach; or if it is the Scottish Government and Education Scotland who would shape the approach (an possibly a supporting document) that can provide more clarity and stability for CfE in the long run. From the OECD team's school visits, it was evident that CfE was implemented and consolidated in schools, especially through BGE. The intended learning is in place, and schools are confident in the way they have adopted CfE to match their learners' needs. There has been clarity on the four capacities and the objectives, but these have also been mixed with new priorities without coherence with CfE. As policy messages evolve, the main CfE focus may disappear, and those in schools may lose track of the overall coherence between CfE and the rest of the school improvement initiatives and concentrate on their day-to-day learning and teaching activities.

Whether Scotland would need a new implementation strategy at this point is to be considered, as CfE has now been implemented for ten years. But a more clear conceptualisation of what next for CfE as Scotland faces it future, with uncertainties such as COVID or Brexit, would be valuable to all those involved. It is not clear whether the CAB has a clear long-term strategy in relation to CfE or is reviewing its evolution in light of issues that may arise. Having a longer term strategy for CfE, for its revision if needed, with defined responsibilities and institutions that are stable and prepared for shaping next steps, and are also there to ensure policy alignment around schools and student learning from 3 to 18 would be an asset to CfE and to the Scottish government.

In 2016, following the OECD review of the Scottish Education system, the Scottish government took a series of measures to streamline, clarify and refresh CfE. These have contributed to some clarity in CfE and on government priorities and understanding of progress in a range of areas highlighted in CfE and the equity and quality framework for action. There are more supports and guidance for schools, and more information and research on progress made with CfE. There are also many stakeholders involved in analysis and reviews of CfE, bringing many concerns to the table.

For the next steps, it will be important to develop a shared understanding of CfE's contributions to effective student learning and wellbeing and to set up a policy making and implementation process for CfE that is stable and conducive to trust.

Progress with implementation of CfE

CfE, which was initiated in 2004 and has reached 2020 with a large scale of accomplishments can benefit from a comprehensive assessment of its implementation to define next steps. As every other education policy, evaluation can help to reflect on what is working and how to improve for the future. The previous chapters pointed to Scotland's considerable achievements with CfE and to notable progress since 2015. The analysis also raised a number of issues that should be tackled for schools across the country to continue delivering CfE, and for students to have a coherent learning trajectory from 3 to 18 that consolidates the four capacities consistently and prepares students for their future.

A bold initiative requiring a focus on learners' journey

CfE as a policy was a bold initiative in its inception that has progressed and reached school across Scotland. Its main vision and objectives are still relevant. It remains valid for its bold, aspirational, future-oriented approach, and continues being an inspiring international example, with its four capacities. It has served as example to many other countries and its key message has strong resemblance with the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of OECD ("Compass for Learning"). CfE allows for reasonable coherence and seems to work increasingly well in Broad General Education (for learners aged 3-15). It has been implemented and adopted across schools up to this age, where the concepts of CfE, the pedagogical approaches, the learning and assessments appear to be well consolidated.

After two decades since its inception, Scotland should consider renewing its commitment to CfE's bold and relevant vision. A key challenge facing CfE is how to create more coherence and alignment between the curricular vision and goals for learning, a suitable pedagogy and adequate assessment approaches, especially in light of COVID. CfE has worthwhile ideals and its implementation is still progressing, but the coherence of CfE enactment is less consistent in the Senior Phase (for learners aged 15-18), where fundamental challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment redesign. Without taking up this task, the practices in senior secondary will keep lagging behind in essential curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment), and will also exercise a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education.

Towards a shared ownership of CfE

Stakeholder engagement is truly at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence. Significant efforts were made to engage stakeholders throughout CfE's lifecycle, which contributed to successes with CfE. The great degree of stakeholder involvement around CfE and the communication and development of a shared language created the conditions for shared ownership and wide support of CfE's vision. Stakeholders agree that schools and the profession should hold responsibility for conception, implementation and outcomes of their own curricula, provided the rest of the system fulfil their own responsibilities to support schools and the profession within a clear policy framework, through curriculum delivery and policy changes.

Several challenges inherent to stakeholder engagement around CfE where highlighted, however. First, there is a gap between the seemingly intense involvement of stakeholders at all levels of the system, and the confidence they have in their effective influence on decision-making. Decision-makers should earn back and nurture stakeholders' trust so their engagement fulfils its potential for CfE implementation. Especially, two aspects of stakeholder engagement around CfE seem to weaken this potential: the clarity of purpose of engagement initiatives and their consistence with the use of stakeholders' input. Second, CfE ownership was most often described as fragmented, with too many stakeholders claiming ownership of CfE while not necessarily fulfilling the responsibilities that come with such ownership were unclear. Transparency in the division of responsibilities among stakeholders is a necessary condition for policy success, in a system that promotes shared responsibility of its curriculum. Third, communication around CfE remains confused, which can hinder implementation by leaving CfE open to wide interpretations and overwhelm schools, learners and parents.

Continuing efforts towards alignment

A conducive policy environment is needed to support and sustain the implementation of CfE; not just the kinds of policies needed to enable effective implementation, but the alignment between them that can give teachers and school leaders the agency to design the learning experiences promised for Scotland's children and young people by CfE twenty years ago. The originality of CfE at the time of its development

and its continued relevance and influence on the international stage continues to influence international curriculum policy; affording autonomy at school level within a national framework is now widely used as a curriculum design principle. The implementation challenges of these approaches are shared by other systems.

There are a range of challenges for Scotland in ensuring that the policy environment is conducive to the aspirations and implementation of CfE are identified in this chapter. The capacity of teachers and school leaders to be curriculum makers at school level has developed since CfE was introduced, supported by a range of CPD and support materials. The review found that the capacity of school leaders, and elements of system leadership were being constrained by multiple initiatives in a busy local and national policy environment The promise of assessment aligned with CfE has not been fully realised. This gap is the most significant barrier to implementation in the secondary sector with the backwash from qualifications in the senior phase now shaping the experience of learners more than the aspirations of CfE. This alignment challenge extends beyond assessment. While the policy environment is crowded with multiple initiatives, gaps – such as that in assessment for example – remain, and where new polices are introduced (or old ones re-branded) alignment and coherence is a problem. Another notable gap in the policy environment is an established systematic review cycle for CfE supported by robust data and evidence.

An adaptable approach to implementation

The follow up of implementation by the Curriculum and Assessment Board and its predecessor has provided a venue to engage many stakeholders, get input and feedback and develop shared agreements on progress and challenges. It has also allowed for responsiveness to the challenges raised regarding CfE implementation. The lack of a clear implementation strategy has given schools and local authorities much freedom and autonomy to design and shape next steps, possibly building capacity on the ground. Constant efforts were made to communicate about CfE and its developments, but in an ad hoc manner involving many documents, reports, supporting materials, without a clear sequence of events.

As the strategy has been more organic, there is not direct opportunity to look forward, and plan CfE with a longer terms perspective. For the next steps, it will be important to develop a shared understanding of CfEs contributions to effective student learning and wellbeing and to set up a policy making and implementation process for CfE that is stable and conducive to trust. The suggestions proposed below bring together different dimensions to guide the actions of education stakeholders and institutions to consolidate a high quality learning experience for students in Scotland. The next steps will require refining them from an actionable perspective into a coherent strategy: what needs to be done, by whom, when and how will it be measured.

Recommendations for next steps: focusing on student learning progress

Scotland has been successful in implementing CfE across schools, especially up to BGE. CfE is well known by all those interviews and well supported. CfE has been developed and improved through a co-design process. While they cannot be attributed directly to the latest reforms, results in global competences of 15-year-old students in PISA could be related to CfE and its broaders concepts included in the four capacities. The NIF also shows progress in recent years in a number of fronts related to CfE.

From schools perspectives, CfE is a solid curriculum, that has given education professionals agency to shape it and deliver it to adapt to school needs. After ten years of experience, with the first student cohorts having completed their education through the lens of CfE, it is a good opportunity to review practice. A focus on students' learning experiences and trajectories can be the most suitable implementation angle to define next steps.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen CfE learning and transitions from 3 to 18

1.1: Renew commitment to the vision of CfE for all learners

The core message of CfE remains relevant and valid for its bold, aspirational, future-oriented approach. It has served as an example to many other countries and its key message has strong resemblance with the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of OECD (Learning Compass), developed through research and peer exchanges.

Consolidation of and recommitment to the vision could help after a full cycle of practice. It might be stimulating to take a fresh look at it to see whether some updates and adjustments are worthwhile. As CfE was characterised by someone as a "clash between 19th century exams and a 21st century curriculum", it is not surprising that many different interpretations have evolved about what is actually meant. Moreover, although CfE was future-oriented in spirit, it also allows to acknowledge that society has changed in many ways since its inception.. Dialogues between various stakeholders might help in clarifying and simplifying the core philosophy, confirming support, but also in identifying and sharpening the understanding of persistent inconsistencies between ideals and practices.

It is also important to recognise that the broad aims of CfE and the four purposes require considering the influence of the wider context in their accomplishment. For example, efforts to reduce the attainment gap will not be possible solely through schooling and CfE in particular, as there are other socio-economic factors that influence learner outcomes. It will require broader coalitions with welfare, housing or health policy for example.

1.2: Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE

Recommitting to the CfE vision should have implications for the senior phase, as there are some discrepancies between the overall philosophy (as expressed in its four capacities) and the way that the Senior Phase is designed, implemented and assessed.

Challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment redesign in the Senior Phase, which should be better integrated in the CfE framework. This task needs broad and active involvement of representatives from further and higher education and from the world of work. Without addressing these challenges, the practices in senior phase may keep lagging behind in the essential curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment), but will also maintain a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education.

Another challenge is how to create more coherence and alignment between the curricular vision and goals for learning, a suitable pedagogy and adequate assessment approaches. The extensive CfE policies appear to allow for reasonable coherence for learners aged 3-15 (and also for advanced courses), with learning activities seemingly in line with the vision, and a commitment to varied instructional practices. Most schools seem to be able to tailor the curriculum to students' needs, through the high quality of teachers, educational leadership and local and regional support for schools and professionals. However, the coherence of CfE enactment is questionable for 15-18 learners, as:

- the qualifications focus the attention on passing exams, limiting the wider purpose and scope of CfE;
- the range of learning activities appears narrow, with more 'traditional' instructional patterns;
- there is ambiguity about issues of student choice and breadth of learning in relation to the number of subjects;
- many subjects lack time for going in depth;
- there is emphasis on "traditional" exam- and memory-based assessment.

The approach to student assessment in the classroom will not change in the Senior Phase unless the approach to qualifications is fully aligned to match CfE ambitions. It is beyond the scope of this report to go into detailed recommendations about possible improvements in assessment and examinations, and it is foreseen that the OECD will complete a working paper with options for student assessment in Scotland. At this point, we can recommend considering a range of options that could even be piloted:

- more portfolio assessment approaches, with rubrics that consider the entire curriculum spirit (N.B. the four capacities)
- more flexible, formative and continuous assessment over time than the current all-in-one final, summative exam events
- more use of digital opportunities for feedback and feedforward
- maintaining (even strengthening) a strong role for teacher judgments.

Second, in view of the intended variation in positive destinations, allowing for more variation within the Senior Phase and deliberately seeking variation in profiles, pathways and specializations aligns better with CfE ambitions. The increase in certifications responds to this variation. Exploring this purposive redesign for variation, it would be very wise to involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders and experts from various backgrounds and interests through a collaborative, interactive search for alternatives to the current curriculum pathways.

As a source of inspiration for considerations for upper secondary education, the conclusions from a recent comparative study on upper secondary education (O'Donnell, 2018) gives some food for thought:

- Upper secondary education systems appear not to be a 'one-size-fits-all' offer, but rather to provide students with a range of options with a view to suiting their future destination.
- There is demand for upper secondary alternatives to traditional academic pathways.
- Internal assessment arrangements feature prominently in the upper secondary phase, but have a heightened role in vocational, as opposed to academic, pathways, and are a particular feature of credit-based systems.
- Planning—both at the individual student level and in terms of local planning of provision—is increasingly important as jurisdictions offer an increasing variety of pathways.
- Preparatory 'years' or programs, offering a 'breathing space' between lower and upper secondary education, are being offered or considered as a way in which students can better plan for and be better prepared for the upper secondary phase.
- Bridging programs, to allow more permeability between tracks, are developing features of upper secondary education in international jurisdictions.
- Environments outside of school, e.g., alternative/training providers, work-based learning or community learning make a key contribution to experiential learning in this phase.
- Official records of achievement, in addition to certificates, are a feature of the upper secondary phase, serving the needs of students and of future employers or educational institutions.
- Upper secondary curricula and assessment systems are closely interwoven and interdependent.
- There is a focus in the upper secondary 'offer' on ensuring students' physical and mental wellbeing.
- Links to the previous and next phases of a student's career and education are crucial, and consequently reforms introduced in this phase can have wide-ranging implications at individual and system level.

1.3: Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning

The aspirations for broad and rich education for all learners should remain a strength of the Scottish education system. However, 'rich' is not necessarily the same as broad in the sense maximizing the

number of subjects. It should first and foremost aim at developing a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes (taken together in 'competencies') as a common foundation for all students; see, for example, the OECD 2030 Learning Compass. More specialisation can come later in upper secondary education. And, not to forget, rich should also imply 'depth' of understanding, avoiding the often (internationally) criticised 'ocean-wide, inch-deep' approaches. That implies that endless adding of subjects or themes is counterproductive. Selecting, updating, prioritizing and combining aims and contents remain inevitable. Partly, from time to time, that should be agreed upon in the (evolving) national curriculum framework, for example, by deciding about goals and contents of a limited number of common core subjects over the subsequent stages of education. Partly, such choices are better left to schools, teachers and learners (and their parents) to allow for flexible choices and variation in curriculum provision. Such an approach better reflects the principle of 'subsidiarity' (see later).

Having said that, there is easily a tension between breadth and depth of learning new knowledge. How to cope with that? A possible compromise is in creating broader learning areas in general education, while later in secondary education discipline-based subjects or work-focused courses become gradually more prominent. In the senior phase, when the number of subjects has decreased (but with more time per subject), subjects should show their own merit, but also demonstrate their value in contributing to understanding and skills formation in interdisciplinary domains, themes and projects. Such an approach reflects a nowadays prominent ideal of equipping youngsters with a T-profile to prepare them for a range of challenges in further studies, work and life: strong basic skills in literacy and numeracy plus a broad, interdisciplinary foundation of competencies, combined with deeper, more specialised disciplinary knowledge. Such subject knowledge should then less focus on reproduction of facts to be memorised, but more on understanding of disciplinary core ideas and cross-cutting concepts and also pay attention to characteristic ways of thinking and acting within subject-related professional practices.

1.4: Continue building curricular capacity at various levels using research

About the process of continuous curriculum improvement: keep investing in curricular capacity building. The primary focus of those investments should be to strengthen the capacity for curriculum making by teachers and school leaders at local school levels through a variety of measures: time facilities; creating space for joint curriculum design and experimentation space within schools; exchange and collaboration between teachers and school leaders between schools; school specific support; collaboration with universities; strengthening the curricular nature of regional networks.

Such an approach also is in line with the strategic principle of subsidiarity: leave curricular decision making as much as possible close to practice, within an agreed upon regulatory framework at system level. Multi-agency over CfE is important, whilst allowing for purposive variation in local sense and coherence making.

This does not imply that schools should work in isolation from other agencies and stakeholders. Dialogue and interaction should be promoted with other system partners (teacher educators, administrators, inspectors, and the like).

In relation to capacity building at various levels and for various purposes: do intensify and coordinate research initiatives along various lines:

- site-specific, collaborative approaches of researchers and practitioners around curricular issues, combining (joint) teacher professional learning, classroom improvement, school development; all contributing to site-specific curricular capacity building on the ground but also to (more generic) knowledge accumulation about successful curriculum change;
- more system-wide monitoring on both the enacted curriculum (notably classroom practices) and the attained curriculum (student experiences, outcomes, and destinations) to feed continuous improvement of curriculum policies and practices.

- both approaches should contribute to a better collective, systemic learning system; also, in view of future, more periodical curriculum reviews (see chapter 4); and hopefully also reducing excessive politization and ad hoc nature of the educational debate.

Recommendation 2: Lead CfE collaboratively

2.1: Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE

Stakeholder involvement with CfE should follow a stable and purposeful approach that result in effective contribution to decision-making. Currently, the sheer number of "invited" engagement mechanisms by system leaders, and of stakeholders' own initiatives blur the landscape, work against the effective inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes, and lessen the truly collaborative approach that Scotland could benefit from to enhance CfE implementation. With CfE in place for over a decade, system leaders with stakeholders should adopt a more stable and structured approach to involvement. For instance, and in keeping with the recommendation made below about review cycles (cross ref to policy coherence), opportunities for stakeholder involvement could be built within an overarching review cycle, which could help make stakeholders' input more impactful.

System leaders at national and local levels should continue to encourage stakeholders' involvement with CfE by structuring better each engagement initiative they offer. Structured involvement requires first to clarify the purpose of each initiative and design the involvement approach accordingly. Stakeholders can be involved for a myriad of objectives, ranging from information and consultation, to ongoing involvement, collaboration and empowerment, each a strong tool for both public decision-makers and stakeholders, but only if chosen and designed in adequacy with the purpose of engagement. For instance, one of the conclusions from Chapter 2 is to review the senior phase to align it with CfE ambitions. With this goal in mind, system leaders could design an large-scale review process with the goal to co-design a senior phase that would align with CfE ambitions. This would include at least two parts of engagement: a national consultation with the public on what they believe should be the purpose and structure of such a senior phase; and a series of working group mixing (for instance) learners, teachers, school leaders, university recruitment officers and professors, and scholars specialised in curriculum, assessment and upper secondary education. The example of the NCCA review proposed in Box x (Chapter 3) could serve for inspiration, although Scotland would need to design its own approach.

Second, system leaders should also fulfil the promise of genuine stakeholder engagement, and let stakeholders' feedback, insight, and contributions to collaborative endeavour influence decision-making. In keeping with the hypothetical example of a senior phase review, this would imply drawing concrete orientations from the national consultation, which would guide the working groups and the resulting senior phase renewal. A way to encourage stakeholders and reassure them of the genuine nature of their engagement is to explain ahead of time how their input will use with some degree of details; and then respect this involvement contract when the time comes to use their contributions for decision-making.

2.2: Revise and maintain the division of responsibilities for CfE

To fulfil Scotland's commitment to a shared ownership of CfE, system leaders and stakeholders need to clarify who bears the various responsibilities implied by CfE in practice, to agree on a clear division of responsibilities and to maintain it over time. There are many different responsibility structures for curriculum policy and implementation across education systems, given the wide range of governance and institutional arrangements. Effective structures do share some characteristics, however, among which transparency and stability of responsibilities. A clear division of responsibilities participates to stakeholders' effective engagement with a policy and thus, to its quality and sustainability.

What does a clear division of CfE responsibilities imply? First, system leaders and stakeholders need to spell out the roles and related responsibilities that CfE calls for. This implies considering questions about

key components of CfE such as: who is in charge of CfE's strategic orientations and coherence? Who is responsible for providing schools and practitioners with the support their need to design and enact their curriculum? Who holds responsibility for offering diversified learning experiences to learners? Currently, responses to these questions vary too widely across Scotland. CfE outcomes obviously result from complex sequences involving actions of different stakeholders at different levels. However, the lack of clarity on who holds responsibility for CfE's key components and how their responsibilities relate to one another is unsustainable. Some suggestions follow for a clear allocation of key CfE responsibilities:

- Who is in charge of CfE's strategic orientations and coherence? A reinforced Curriculum and Assessment Board, for long-term orientations; the Learning Directorate, through a five-year political term and with respect to long-term orientations as set by CAB; local authorities, through a political term, with respect to long-term orientations as set by CAB;
- Who is responsible for providing support to schools and practitioners with CfE? Local authorities to provide ongoing, proximity support (e.g. with partnerships); RICs to facilitate collaborations between schools across local authorities; Education Scotland through centralised resources to inspire and support practitioners;

Second, duplication of responsibilities should be avoided when feasible, which could lead to the redistribution of some responsibilities to one entity, or to the merging of some committees whose mandates and membership might be duplicated. In some instances, some overlap between responsibilities is unavoidable. In these cases, overlap should be minimised and structured, by specifying specific levels or areas of responsibilities and relationships between the various stakeholders involved. In other cases, it might appear that there are gaps in the responsibility structure, or that the current responsibility holder is not the most adequate to continue implementing CfE.

Third, stakeholders who hold responsibilities should have matching capacity and resources. On several occasions, it was made clear to the OECD team that duplication of responsibilities sometimes happens because the agency or institution with the official mandate for an aspect of CfE does not have the capacity, resources or ability to fulfil its responsibilities. Once clarified, individual responsibilities must also be considered in relation to each other, and highlight what stakeholders need from others in order to fulfil their responsibility. Once an effective division of responsibilities has been clarified and possible changes have been agreed upon with stakeholders, the responsibility structure should remain unchanged for a number of years.

2.3: Structure a coherent communication strategy to rekindle shared meaning

System leaders, with the Learning Directorate and Education Scotland at the forefront, should develop a communication strategy about CfE and collaborate with practitioners, scholars and other CfE stakeholders as their do so. The stakes of CfE communication is no longer, after more than a decade, in convincing people to adopt a new policy. However, the policy and its implementation processes can evolve and these evolutions need to be communicated effectively. The first step will be for system leaders to develop some strategic approach to CfE communication, planning the necessary official communications, events and other publications ahead of time and in coherence with CfE evolutions. In this, a recommendation proposed below about creating structured review cycles goes hand in hand with a more strategic approach to communication. In the case of Scotland, an effective communication strategy would offer clear messages that are simple to understand and based on educational evidence; and be coherent throughout the system, even if it involves different actors.

To be effective, communication around CfE require sharper messages and more accessible language. When developing this communication, system leaders should sustain a dialogue with the profession and key stakeholders about the language of CfE, clarifying or doing away with "technical jargon", and agreeing on the definition of terms and revising the existing documentation through this lens. The effectiveness of the communication strategy also relies on selecting an appropriate medium and language to engage with

stakeholders, as the trust vested in the communicator affects how the received information will be interpreted (Gouedard et al 2020). This implies producing only those documents and communications that are necessary to the understanding of new initiatives, for instance.

The communication strategy comes in support of CfE evolutions and stakeholder engagement, and should therefore be planned as part of the ongoing strategy for continued CfE implementation. In keeping with a hypothetical example used above, if Scotland was to decide on a review of the senior phase to align with CfE ambitions, communications would need to be planned in a coherent manner to support and sustain interest in the consultation; and then later, in a possible proposal for a new senior phase structure.

Recommendation 3: Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change

3.1: Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence

Consider policy and institutional simplification, ending or combining some policy initiatives/strategic frameworks around CfE. The system shocks caused by the current pandemic afford an opportunity for consolidation so that the efforts of school and system leadership can be re-focused on student learning – the heart of CfE. This simplification should extend to institutions and agencies in the education policy system in Scotland. Although reviews of agencies are part of broader government and public sector reform agendas, the government might consider a particular review of the education sector with a remit to simplify and consolidate to give all stakeholders and the wider public a clear line of sight on where responsibility and ownership lies. It is possible to sustain stakeholder engagement and support, and strong deliberative processes, while at the same time having fewer organisations, and perhaps fewer but more focused and meaningful consultation processes. The OECD team is conscious that many of the agencies and organisations working across education in Scotland are themselves the products of reviews or consultation processes or consequences of public sector funding challenges. However, the panel believes that a tipping point has now been reached, where there is a risk that some previous structural changes to support the implementation of CfE may now be a barrier to its future development.

Given the high international profile of Scotland in curriculum innovation policy and research, and the need to establish clear ownership for CfE consideration should be given to a stand alone agency responsible for curriculum (and perhaps assessment) into the future. Aware that this was a situation that existed historically in Scotland, the panel believes that the complexities of contemporary and future curriculum, especially as envisaged in CfE, needs dedicated support and ownership. The remit for an agency of this kind could include the ongoing monitoring of the most effective balance between flexibility and prescription and between personalisation and equity.

Such a review of structures should also include a focus on the Inspectorate. Historically associated with innovation in school evaluation, the inspectorate in Scotland has influenced the development of inspection in a number of school systems. A refreshed Inspectorate – perhaps with a renewed independent remit - could focus on:

- advising on the appropriate levels of autonomy for particular schools based on a number of agreed factors including leadership capacity, student attainment over time, curriculum plan and coherence
- advising on or commissioning research in and with school to inform school monitoring and evaluation, system intelligence on student attainment and school quality – all of which could be used in a cycle of curriculum reform (see below)
- building on current strengths in peer and self-evaluation for schools that includes CfE implementation at school level
- developing strategic distance from other organisations and agencies supporting schools that gives stakeholders, the public and the political system confidence in its independence and rigour.

As a national agency, an independent Inspectorate is a key policy tool for consistency and comparability across federated or devolved systems. This is an important consideration for Scotland; the need for greater assurance that national aspirations were being delivered for all children and young people was clearly evident in discussions with the OECD review panel.

3.2: Align qualifications and curriculum to deliver on the commitment of Building the Curriculum 5

Actions in two areas are needed to support the assessment framework outlined in 2011; the first concerns qualifications in the senior phase; the second, the commitment to ongoing monitoring of local and national progress and achievement.

The commitment made in Building the Curriculum 5 that the review of qualifications would align with CfE has not been delivered to date. For the secondary sector in particular, consequent absence of alignment between curriculum and assessment is the single biggest barrier to the implementation of CfE. The OECD panel found complete consensus on this issue, but no enthusiasm for a root and branch review of qualifications given the disruption to the system that would follow, and no agreement as to what a qualification system aligned with CfE would look like.

Recent developments in the current arrangements for qualifications that allow students to access courses from local colleges alongside their studies for Highers or Advanced Highers were seen as supporting the CfE emphasis on personalised learning. These changes and were generally viewed as positive, although some stakeholder expressed a concern that the complexity of the qualifications offering in the senior phase was difficult to explain to parents and learners.

However, the emergency measures that have had to be introduced in response to COVID-19 may provide some possibilities for development in the short-term that could be the basis for longer-term change. A key question that would require some consideration would be whether the agency responsible for curriculum proposed above should also be responsible for assessment design from 3-18. A separate body might be responsible for the regulation and quality of qualifications, (currently part of the remit of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), but the development work would be undertaken alongside the development of the curriculum.

The OECD is working on a separate paper outlining some assessment challenges and options for Scotland looking to the future; this should inform the deliberations on how to move forward on the next steps in assessment. At this stage, the following is recommended:

- The Government should acknowledge the unfinished business in implementing the commitments of Building the Curriculum 5 and commit to undertaking the task for the senior phase in particular within a specified timeframe.
- Conduct an international benchmarking exercise focused on the numbers of courses taken by learners, and importantly, the duration of studies in this phase of education to inform decision-making on both of these issues as a first step in reform.
- Commission independent research on transition to the senior phase in a sample of different school types, including a learner and parent perspective.
- Identify the assessment modes that could be used in school and external assessment with young adult in this stage of their education and consider piloting them focusing on
  - How the assessment mode contributes to the four capacities and principles of CfE
  - Whether the assessment is best suited for school or external use
  - The proportion of traditional examination hall style assessment that should be included in a qualification at this stage

None of these recommendations require any immediate change for schools, or for SQA. In the short-term it would be business as usual in the senior phase. However, the setting of a time frame for change and the generation of an evidence base, together with some of the structural changes proposed in organisations and agencies would signal the direction of policy and generate an evidence base to inform any changes.

A number of initiatives have been put in place to support the ongoing monitoring of student achievement since the introduction of CfE. Reporting on the levels has its limitations, as discussed above, given that they were designed to support teacher planning and judgement, and not for the purposes of measuring national progress. Small changes in data of this kind cannot give the system the intelligence it needs to monitor the achievement of particular groups of students within the cohort. Similarly, while the census based tests (SNSA) are planned and their rollout is underway, the purpose and usefulness of these is already being questioned. Designed to provide data to support teacher judgement AND information for system monitoring, it is questionable whether census based test of this kind can serve both purposes well.

The Framework for Assessment is ambitious on the kinds of monitoring needed to support CfE over time. Three priories are identified for the range of information needed; information to support an account of success at local and national levels; information that describes progress and achievement against standards and expectations; and a particular focus on supporting points of transition in the system.

The OECD team believes that there is now an urgent need for robust reliable data to support these priorities and support wider policy and decision making, as well as the curriculum review cycle discussed below. Previous attempts at this kind of sample monitoring were not successful for a range of reasons. The experiences of other systems in recent years in building these sample-based systems that make very little demands on teachers and schools but provide extremely useful information can inform the deliberations in Scotland. These long term monitoring arrangements allow for particular focus on under-achieving groups within the population, and give rise to a dataset that can be made available to independent researchers for additional data-mining and research. The arrangements in the Republic of Ireland are noteworthy for their longevity, and how the data continues to be used by a wide range of agencies, notably, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in its review processes.

Box 5.1. Monitoring student achievement over time in the Republic of Ireland

The long established National Assessment of Mathematics and Reading Skills (NAMER) running in Ireland since 1972 has consistently provided data to the Irish system that has informed key decisions on a wide variety of policy priorities such as closing the gap in literacy and numeracy attainment in high poverty schools, Irish-medium education, and the new language curriculum for primary schools. Data has been used to show the impact of initiatives, and to modify and refocus as needed.

Sample-based monitoring systems of this kind require long-term commitment and sustainable funding, as they need to outlive governments.

Source: Educational Research Centre: National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER), https://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/national-assessments

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3.3: Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review

Data collected through ongoing monitoring, together with independent research and intelligence from the Inspectorate can inform cycles that address particular aspects of CfE within a planned and specified timeframe. Such a planned and systemic approach to review might serve Scotland well given the level of public interest in education. An agreed systematic approach would also reducing reliance on external independent reviews when controversies arise and build internal capacity for curriculum monitoring.

A review cycle might also reduce the need for ongoing guidance and clarifications, and give the system greater stability overall. The energy of leaders could be redirected to focus on the implementation of CfE in their school, rather than responding to the most recent 'update' or clarification.

Moving in this direction would need to be carefully planned and is likely to require some organisational re-structuring so that it clear to the system – and to the wider public - which organisation is responsible and accountable for the processes and quality of the review and the speedy implementation of the recommendations. In general, systems with specialist curriculum units or organisations, assign the review responsibilities to the same agency with some distance between the work of the review and central government to allow for clear lines of reporting and responsibility – the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland for example, and the Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority. In both cases, central government can request a review of a specific area, independently of the agreed cycle. This allows for urgent issues to be responded to quickly by a Minister/Council of Ministers acting in the public interest without embroiling the political system in the details of a curriculum controversy.

Such a systematic more apolitical approach is well suited to a system such as Scotland's where there is high level of interest in education.

Recommendation 4: Plan a structured approach to CfE with a long term focus

Scotland can adopt a coherent approach to the ongoing implementation of CfE, which builds on the strengths of the system and the policy to tackle its challenges. The continued efforts made throughout Scotland to develop and improve CfE are a testament to the system's long-term commitment to educational quality. The effectiveness of these efforts has been lessened, nevertheless, by their ad hoc nature and the difficulties to sustain their coherence in the absence of a structured approach to implementation.

Planning a structured approach to CfE implementation will help reinforce the policy's internal coherence (the design and eventual review of its many building blocks) and its external coherence with other education policies. Paired with a collaborative ownership of the policy, it will offer better guaranties for the sustainability of Curriculum for Excellence.

This report provides a set of recommendations that can be weaved together and considered for this structured approach to the future of CfE. Each recommendation points to a number of actions that should be taken to strengthen CfE and tackle its ongoing implementation challenges, but they need to be considered coherence with each other rather than individual policy actions. A structured approach to CfE implementation, building on the system's existing strengths and this report's recommendations, can help Scotland not only tackle ongoing or future challenges for CfE but also provide a platform for effective and sustained review of the change process and how it is reaching its objectives to help all learners achieve excellence.

Annex A. OECD assessment team members

The following team of OECD and external experts was assembled specifically for the implementation assessment of CfE:

Dr Beatriz Pont: a Senior Education Policy Analyst at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, Beatriz leads the OECD Education Policy Implementation team. She has extensive international experience in education policy reform in areas including equity and quality in education, school leadership, adult learning and adult skills. She has worked with individual countries such as Mexico, Norway, Sweden or the United Kingdom (Wales) in their school improvement reform efforts. Beatriz holds a PhD from the Complutense University, Madrid and a honorary doctorate from Sheffield Hallam University. She studied Political Science at Pitzer College and holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Columbia University. She has been research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences (Tokyo University) and at the Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies (LIEPP, Science Po, Paris). She was previously a researcher on education and social policies in the Economic and Social Council of the Government of Spain.

Romane Viennet is a Policy Analyst with the OECD Policy Advice and Implementation division at the OECD's Education Directorate. She co-ordinates the OECD Implementation assessment of Scotland's CfE and has previously taken part in similar OECD assessments of school education policies in Wales (UK), Ireland, Norway, and Mexico. Romane holds a Master's degree in International Affairs and a B.A. in political science and economics, both from Sciences Po Paris. She has worked previously as a social impact analyst in France, and as a research assistant in behavioural economics projects in Cornell University, New York. Her research interests include education policy implementation and change processes in public policy.

Professor Anne Looney is the Executive Dean of Dublin City University's Institute of Education, Ireland's largest faculty of education. From 2001 until 2016 she was the CEO of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the agency responsible for curriculum and assessment for early years, primary and post-primary education in Ireland. She also held the position of Interim CEO at the Higher Education Authority until March 2017. She completed her doctoral studies at the Institute of Education in London. In 2014/2015 she was Professorial Research Fellow at the Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, based at Australian Catholic University in Brisbane. Her current research interests include assessment policy and practice, curriculum, teacher identity and professional standards for teachers and teaching. She has also published on religious, moral and civic education, and education policy. She has been a team member for reviews for the OECD on school quality and assessment systems, and is the current president of the International Professional Development Association.

Professor Jan van den Akker is Professor Emeritus at the University of Twente (the Netherlands), where he held for many years a Chair on Curriculum Design and Implementation. Moreover, from 2005 till 2016 he was Director General of SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development), overseeing all curriculum developments in primary and secondary education. Since 2016, Jan has been acting as independent curriculum researcher and consultant, building on very broad international experiences in dozens of countries and including various visiting professorships (most recently at the Humboldt University in Berlin). Jan's main areas of expertise include: curriculum policy making (in comparative perspective); curriculum development, in interaction with teacher learning and school development; methodology of design research in education.

Annex B. Schedule of the OECD visits to Scotland

The project ran from July 2020 to April 2021, and was thus subject to travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 global pandemic that occurred at this period. As a result, all visits and interviews were conducted online.

Table A B.1. First fact-finding virtual visit to Scotland (28 September – 2 October 2020)

<!!Type the subtitle here. If you do not need a subtitle, please delete this line.!!>

Date and time (GMT)	Activity / Stakeholder
Monday 28 September 2020 09:00-10:10	**Scottish Education Council Representatives** Local authority Director of Education and Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead Educational Institute of Scotland School Leaders Scotland General Teaching Council Scotland National Parent Forum Scotland Scottish Qualifications Authority
10:30 -11:15	**Scottish Practitioner Forum Representatives**
11:30-12:40	**Scottish Government Learning Directorate Officials** Director of Learning Deputy Director, Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Deputy Director Improvement, Attainment and Wellbeing OECD Review National Co-ordinator & Senior Phase Policy Lead
13:40-14:50	**Scottish Qualifications Authority** Chief Executive Director of Qualifications Development
15:10-16:20	**Employers** Vice Chair of the Employer's Forum Co-Chair of Glasgow Developing Young Workforce Regional Group
Tuesday 29 September 2020 10:00-11:10	**College representatives.** Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland Chief Executive, College Development Network Deputy Director of Skills & Economic Recovery, Scottish Funding Council
11:30-13:00	**Local Authorities** Executive Director Education & Children's Services, Fife Council & Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, South East Alliance Depute Chief Executive and Director of People, South Ayrshire & Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, South West Collaborative Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, Perth & Kinross & Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, Tayside Collaborative Director of Children's Services, Shetland & Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, Northern Alliance Lead Officer for Forth Valley & West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative. Director of Education, East Renfrewshire & Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, The West Partnership Director of Children's Services, Renfrewshire Council

14:00-15:10	**Education Scotland** Chief Executive Strategic Director, Lifelong Learning Head of Curriculum Innovation Strategic Director for Scrutiny
15:20-16:20	**National Agencies (Skills)** Director of Critical Skills and Occupations, Skills Development Scotland Director of Career Information Advice and Guidance, Skills Development Scotland Chief Executive, Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework Partnership
Wednesday 30 September 2020 10:00-10:40	**Community Learning & Development and Youthwork representatives** Chief Executive, Youthlink Scotland Chair of Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland
10:50-11:30	**Scottish Attainment Challenge/Additional Support Needs representatives** Senior Regional Adviser, Education Scotland Chair of Additional Support for Learning Advisory Group
11:50-13:00	**Teacher Professional Learning & Leadership representatives** Chief Executive, General Teaching Council Scotland Director of Education, Registration and Professional Learning Head of Professional Learning and Leadership, Education Scotland Executive Director of Education, Glasgow
14:00-15:10	**Higher Education representatives**. Chair of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education & University of Aberdeen Professor Sally Mapstone, Chair Universities Scotland's Admissions Policy Group, Dr Neil Croll, Member of the Commission for Widening Access: Access Delivery Group
15:20-16:30	**Education Researchers** Dr Keir Bloomer (Royal Society of Edinburgh, Education Committee): Prof Louise Hayward, Professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation, University of Glasgow Prof Kay Livingston, University of Glasgow Dr Nicola Carse (Edinburgh University and Chair of Scottish Educational Research Association
Thursday 1 October 2020 10:00-11:10	**Headteacher & Teacher Professional Bodies, Unions and Working Groups (1/2)** Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland. Headteacher Royal High School and Chair of the BOCSH Group
11:30-12:40	**Headteacher & Teacher Professional Bodies, Unions and Working Groups (2/2)** General Secretary, Educational Institute of Scotland General Secretary, Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association National Official (Scotland),NASUWT (Scotland) General Secretary, School Leaders Scotland
13:40-14:40	**Parent Organisations** Chief Executive Officer, Connect Vice Chair, National Parent Forum Scotland
15:00-16:00	**Learners and Young Person Organisations** Smart Services Director, Young Scot Joint head of Children's Parliament Chief Executive of Children in Scotland: Chief Executive of the Scottish Youth Parliament
Friday 2 October 2020 10:00-11:30	**Curriculum & Assessment Board** Head Teacher, Harrysmuir Learning Community,West Lothian Head of Humanities, Care & Services.Scottish Qualifications Authority University of Stirling Renfrewshire Council Chair of the ADES Curriculum Network Chief Executive Education Scotland Strategic Director, Lifelong Learning, Education Scotland Chief Executive Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework Chair National Parent Forum Scotland Locality Manager - Clydesdale South Lanarkshire Council | Education Resources Assistant Secretary The Educational Institute of Scotland Senior Director of Service Development & Delivery, ,Skills Development Scotland Director of Service Design and Innovation Skills Development Scotland

	National Executive Member - NASUWT Scotland Director Scottish Council of Independent Schools Assistant General Secretary Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association Deputy Associate Principal, University of Strathclyde
11:45-13:00	**Scottish Parliament Education & Skills Committee** Clare Adamson MSP (Convener) Daniel Johnson MSP (Deputy Convener) Alasdair Allan MSP Kenneth Gibson MSP Iain Gray MSP Jamie Greene MSP Ross Greer MSP Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP Rona Mackay MSP Beatrice Wishart MSP 5 Parliament officials
14:00-15:00	**Gaelic Education Groups** Director of Education, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Chair, Storlann Nàiseanta Parental Officer, Comann nam Pàrant, Chief Executive, Fèisean nan Gàidheal,
15:20-16:20	**Subject Specific Interest Groups** Arts and Learning Manager, Edinburgh City Council Senior Education Officer for Health and Wellbeing, Education Scotland Chair, Scottish Association of Language Teachers ADES Representative, National Profile Raising Group Senior Education Officer for Religious and Moral Education STEM Representative, Institute of Physics Representative from Royal Geographical Society of Scotland Representative from Technology Teachers Association

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Table A B.2. Second fact-finding virtual visit to Scotland (2 – 5 November 2020)

<!!Type the subtitle here. If you do not need a subtitle, please delete this line.!!>

Date and time (GMT)	Activity / Stakeholder
Monday 2 November 2020 09:30-10:45	**Meeting with Colleges, Employers and Community Learning and Development Representatives** Principal Forth Valley College Principal and Chief Executive, West Highland College (University of the Highlands and Islands) Community Benefit Coordinator, CCG Construction Group HR Manager, CCG Construction Group Community Learning & Development, Curriculum Lead, KEAR Campus School
13.00 -16.10 13.00 -13:30 13.40 -14:10 14.20 -14:50 15.00 -15:30 15.40 -16.10	**Virtual Visit to Forehill Primary School, South Ayrshire including meetings with** Headteacher and Senior Management Team Teachers Primary 6 Learners Primary 7 Learners Parent Group
Tuesday 3 November **09:30-12:30** 09:30 -10:00 10:10 -10:40 10:50 -11-20 11:30-12:00 12:10-12:40	**Virtual visit to Tiree High School and Oban High School - including meetings with** Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team Teachers Parent's Council Broad General Education Learners Senior Phase Learners
13.30-14.45	**Focus Group Meeting with National Parents Organisations** Parents nominated by National Parent Forum Scotland and Connect.
Wednesday 4 November **09:30-12:30** 09:30-10:00 10:10-10:40 10:50-11:20 11:30-12:00 12:10-12:40	**Virtual Visit to Castlemilk High School, Glasgow including meetings with** Headteacher and Senior leadership Team Teachers Parent Group Broad General Education Learners Senior Phase Learners
13.30 - 14.45	**Focus Group Meeting with School-age Learners from** Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire Grove Academy, Dundee Stewarton Academy, East Ayrshire
15:00-16:30	**Focus Group Meeting with Headteachers from** Newbattle High School, Midlothian Portlethen Academy, Aberdeenshire Duncanrig Secondary School,South Lanarkshire Hazelhead Primary School, Aberdeen E-Sgoil
Thursday 5 November 2020 **09:00-12:10** 09:00-09:30 09:40-10:10 10:20-10:50 10:50:11:20 11:30-12:00	**Virtual Visit to Aberdeen Grammar School including meetings** Headteacher and Senior Management Team Broad General Education Learners Parents Teachers Senior Phase Learners
13:00-14:15	**Focus Group Meeting with Teachers** from Belmont Academy, South Ayrshire Earlston High School, Scottish Borders Hillhead High School Glasgow Inveralmond Community High School Grange Primary, Angus Gartocharn Primary, West Dunbartonshire Principal Teacher and Pedagogy Group Lead, West Lothian Inclusion Service Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire

14.30-15.45	**Focus Group Meeting with Post School Learners** 4 University students 2 college students 2 post school learners involved in youthwork

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Table A B.3. Additional meetings (2020)

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Date and time (GMT)	Activity / Stakeholder
Tuesday 13 October 16:30-17:30	Professor Mark Priestley, University of Stirling
Friday 13 November 10:00-11:00	Professor Chris Chapman, University of Glasgow
Tuesday 24 November 17:00-18:00	Professor Graham Donaldson, University of Glasgow
Monday 30 November 15:30-16:30	Professor Andrew Hargreaves

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