

Overview Response for Education, Children and Young People Committee Request for Evidence from Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES)

Introduction

ADES is committed to working with government officials, partner agencies, council departments and the third sector organisations who support children young people and their families. The expectation that a period of formal education will be sufficient to improve life chances does not reflect the adverse circumstances and poverty levels experienced by children and young people or recognise the gaps in literacy and numeracy skills that may already exist well before they start school.

ADES took time to consult with its members following the publication of Ken Muir's Report, 'Putting Learner's at The Centre' which resulted in the paper submitted along with this overview paper.

Insufficient time was given to provide an extensive or detailed response for the November Education, Children and Young People's Committee that could be agreed with the ADES membership on all of the current reviews and subsequent recommendations. However, an attempt has been made to make a response that reflect the views of ADES members, ADES Networks and the ADES Executive over the last few months.

International Council of Education Advisers Report 2018-2020

The ICEA recommends:

- an education system that is universally designed and pandemic-proof;
- a commitment to system change that is driven by collaborative professional relationships and underpinned by peer challenge rather than external demands;
- superior digital pedagogies and universally accessible, high quality, and interactive national learning platforms;
- cyclical reviews of Curriculum for Excellence and the realisation of its core capacities;
- deliberate development of increased student capacity for self-directed learning;
- a shift towards continuous professional assessment supported by investment in appropriate professional learning;
- an asset-based view of students, families and communities that avoids stereotypes like Generation C, and refrains from scapegoating marginalized youth;
- a theory of change and leadership approaches that emphasise distributed responsibility and engagement, professional judgment and agency, robust collaborative professionalism, and local energy and ownership;

- integrated learning, health and wellbeing within a place-based holistic educational approach;
- a Networked Learning System to enhance connections among schools and professionals, designed-based research and practice-based professional learning;
- support for leaders in their work and wellbeing through mentoring as a professional entitlement;
- a teaching profession with certification, terms, conditions, support, and professional learning that enhance digital competence, capabilities concerning teaching outside, and strengthened collaborative professionalism.

OECD – ‘Into the Future’, 2021

Over two years ago The OECD 2021 report outlined the need for change in the senior phase. This is a well accepted theme that has regularly been debated for a number of years and ADES agrees that in order to improve outcomes for our children and young people and move towards the vision of Equity and Excellence a change in the senior phase is required.

The OECD 2021 report was commissioned by the Scottish Government to inform the ongoing development of education policy, practice and leadership in Scotland as well as an independent review of the direction of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

Again this OECD report stressed the importance of streamlining our systems and processes to reduce bureaucracy. It is clear that the existing reform landscape is already overly complex with the potential for layers of bureaucracy. The OECD provided examples including OECD reports, ICEA reports, the NIF Review, Putting Learners at the Centre and the review of qualifications.

Addressing the recommendations on a report-by-report basis undermines the OECD call for a systematic approach to curriculum review and a structured long-term approach to implementation to reflect the existing strengths within the system.

ADES Comment

ADES agrees with the OECD that by addressing recommendations on a report by report basis undermines the approach required in Scottish Education at the current time. We require a coherent and well-structured long-term approach that builds on existing strengths in Scottish Education and looks to see where a focus is required for improvement in outcomes for our children and young people.

Stobbart 2021

Stobbart sought to explore the following points in light of the COVID Pandemic:

- the development of a Senior Phase qualification system based on a combination of teacher assessment and exams
- the simplification of S4-5 assessment by “de-cluttering” the historical diet of exams

- the increased use of online exam resources and oral presentations as an assessment format
- the inclusion of pupils views in decisions around assessment
- enhancing the role of vocational qualifications

‘Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is a pioneering example of 21st century curriculum reform. With Scotland positioned within the historic British examination tradition, qualifications for upper-secondary school students have seen far less reform. The cancellations of examinations in 2020-21, and the crises these generated, have provided an opportunity to reconsider the upper-secondary assessment system..... Three major themes emerge from this comparative review. One focuses on how the external assessments could be more innovative in order to capture a wider range of student capabilities. The second is to rethink the role of teacher assessment, with more emphasis placed on continuous school-based assessment. The third is to better integrate the academic and vocational strands with the assessment system which, given SQA’s responsibilities for both, would offer a broader range of curriculum options.’

Extract from Stobbart 2021

ADES Comment

ADES agree that CfE is pioneering and is often the envy of other countries and that we should use CfE as a basis for further developing our curriculum. We also agree that little has changed in the senior phase assessment system and to explore a move to a more continuous assessment system would be welcomed.

Education Reform - ‘Putting Learners at The Centre’, March 2022

In summary, the Putting Learners at the Centre report proposed the following:

- There should be a new agency for qualifications, a new education agency and an independent inspectorate.
- The new education agency should include SQA’s Accreditation/Regulation Directorate and the Community Learning and Development Standards Council.
- The Registrar for Independent Schools should return to the Learning Directorate and link directly with GTCS.
- The staff in Education Scotland who are HM Inspectors or support the inspection functions of Education Scotland should move to an independent inspectorate.
- The new education agency should create and sustain a forum for ongoing and proactive discussion about curriculum, learning and teaching

ADES Comment

ADES agrees with the above proposals in general terms. The detail can be seen in the accompanying paper.

“Change in the education system is a challenge because we need to balance the needs of those in the current system with the pressing need for change. The report (Putting Learner’s at The Centre) strikes the right balance between much needed reform now while pointing over the horizon to the ongoing and more radical change

we need. It is now up to all of us in the system to deliver a more inclusive way of accrediting young people's learning with the right qualifications."

Douglas Hutchison, ADES President

Hayward– 'Its Our Future', June 2023

Its Our Future report was based on the following assumptions -

- Society is changing very quickly, and Scotland should look to the future and consider whether our current qualifications and assessment system is fit for a potentially very different future.
- The international COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted dissatisfaction with Scotland's qualifications. Following the cancellation of examinations in 2020 and 2021, and the alternative approaches taken to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, there was public concern about fairness and widespread dissatisfaction with results and perceptions of inequity.
- The evidence emerging from two OECD reports (OECD, 2021, Stobart, 2021) indicated a need for change in the Senior Phase.
- A longer-term dissatisfaction within Scotland about differences between the original intentions for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) qualifications and learners' experiences of them.

The findings from the Its Our Future Report suggested a number of recommendations including –

- Continuing the process of culture change within the Scottish Education system
- Work to learn from other countries and assessment models
- Use a Scottish Graduation Certificate approach for all young people
- Ensure the offer of a broad curriculum
- Enhance parity of esteem between all types of qualifications
- Time given to professional learning for all staff
- Embed qualifications/assessment within a wider reform agenda

ADES Comment

ADES endorses the Its our Future report and its recommendations and sees this report as the most positive approach to changing the Scottish Education system as outlined in Putting Learner's at the Centre.

Withers Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape, June 2023

Key recommendations made by Withers include:

- the creation of a new single funding and delivery body, bringing together functions from Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and, possibly, the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS)

- giving the enterprise agencies a clear remit for supporting businesses, with workforce planning as an embedded and integrated part of business development and planning
- ensuring there is a clear remit for the new qualifications body – the successor to the SQA - in overseeing development and accreditation of all publicly funded post-school qualifications
- moving responsibility for national skills planning to the Scottish Government
- reform of SDS to create a new body with a singular focus on careers advice and education

ADES Comment

ADES agrees that more coherence and stronger links between SDS and education at a strategic and operational level would enhance outcomes and life chances for our young people.

Specific Questions requested by committee:

1. Progress made to date and the opportunities for and risks of reform

The brief summaries in this document outlines the number of different external reviews and their associated recommendations that cover many similar areas of Reform in the Scottish Education system. These summarised reports are not the only relevant report when exploring reform of the Scottish Education system, the other documents listed below and some not featured here should also be considered in debating the requirements for reform.

The pandemic and the changes in political leadership have slowed progress in reform. The number of external reports has made it difficult to provide coherence and focus to what needs to be retained and what needs to change.

There are many opportunities outlined in the many external reports on the direction of reform but the number of reports and recommendations has paralysed the system. Now is the time for some brave decisions based on all of the advice already provided over the last 3-4 years.

The risk is to ignore the advice and not progress with a review of the senior phase in particular.

2. The impact of all the recent reports and reviews on education reform on the ground

There is no doubt that confusion and frustration exist in the system due to the large number of external reports followed by the number of recommendations making progress unmanageable, swiftly followed by inactivity.

Currently the impact is expectation of change.

3. Progress made on addressing the recommendations of the OECD report of 21 June 2021

There has been little progress other than further external reports

Associated Reports

- [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence.](#)
- [Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective.](#)
- [Curriculum for Excellence review: implementation framework.](#)
- [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education.](#)
- [Education Reform - Consultation Analysis.](#)
- [Putting learners at the centre: response to the independent advisor on education reform's report.](#)
- [All Learners in Scotland Matter - national discussion on education: final report.](#)
- [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment \(the "Withers Report"\).](#)
- [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment \(the "Hayward Review"\).](#)
- [Scottish technology ecosystem: review.](#)
- [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability.](#)
 - o [Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills.](#)