Overview panel on Curriculum for Excellence

Introduction
This paper gives some background on Curriculum for Excellence and suggests five possible topics for discussion.

Background
Curriculum for Excellence began its development in 2002 with a ‘national debate on education.’ It was introduced into S1 in secondary schools in 2010 with the first qualifications being taken by the S4 cohort in 2014. Longstanding issues include those of teacher workload, the quantity and quality of guidance, the amount of assessment activity required and the numbers of subjects that can be studied.

The OECD reported on Scottish Education in 2015. It considered that:

CfE is at a “watershed” moment. There has been a decade of patient work to put in place the full curriculum programme. That programme implementation process is nearing completion and this represents a prime opportunity boldly to enter a new phase.

The Curriculum is based around a ‘Broad General Education’ from pre-school to the end of S3, followed by a ‘Senior Phase’ in which qualifications are taken. The Senior Phase can be in school, college or work-place learning.

Overall, it aims to develop the ‘four capacities’ i.e: helping children to become: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The curriculum covers:

- curriculum subjects and areas
- interdisciplinary learning
- ethos and life of the school
- opportunities for personal achievement

The ‘Broad General Education’ is based on ‘Experiences and Outcomes’ in broad subject areas. These are:

- expressive arts
- languages
• health and well-being
• mathematics
• religious and moral education
• sciences
• social studies
• technologies

Some areas are the responsibility of all and should be integrated across the curriculum. These are:

• health and well-being
• numeracy
• literacy

Pupils progress through the Curriculum at different levels:

Early: Pre-school and P1
First: P2 – P4
Second: P5 – P7
Third and Fourth: S1 – S3
Senior Phase: S4 to S6

Pupils should develop a ‘profile’ of their learning at the end of P7 and S3 as an aid to transition to secondary school and the Senior Phase respectively.

In the Senior Phase, pupils take their qualifications. The main qualifications being:

• National 4 (equivalent to Standard Grade general)
• National 5 (equivalent to Standard Grade credit)
• Higher
• Advanced Higher

For further background on CfE see SPICE Briefing 13/13
For a comparison of historical Scottish qualifications see SCQF

John Swinney has pledged to simplify the guidance surrounding CfE and tackle teacher workload.
Possible themes for discussion

1. Principles and aims of CfE

Potential themes for discussion

- degree to which original intentions of the reform have been met
- reasons for any move away from original objectives

The 2002 “National Debate on Education” which led to the CfE reforms, suggested the need to:
- reduce overcrowding in the curriculum
- make learning more active, challenging and enjoyable
- make better connections between the stages in the curriculum from 3 to 18
- achieve a better balance between “academic” and “vocational” subjects
- broaden the range of learning experiences for young people
- equip young people with core skills
- make sure that approaches to assessment and certification support learning
- offer more choices to meet the needs of individual young people

(See report of the curriculum review group to the Scottish Executive, 2004)

The high level principles that were subsequently developed included the ‘four capacities.’ i.e: CfE aims to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The OECD report (2015) made a number of recommendations based on the idea that CfE:

- needs an ambitious theory of change and a more robust evidence base, especially about learning outcomes and progress. CfE needs to be less managed from the centre and become more a dynamic, highly equitable curriculum being built constantly in schools, networks and communities with a strengthened “middle” in a vision of collective responsibility and multi-layer governance.

The Scottish Government response includes developments such as the National Improvement framework and the simplification of guidance. This included the publication of a ‘Statement for Practioners’ on CfE in August. This stated that:

Moving forward, the two key priorities for CfE are:
- ensuring the best possible progression in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for every child and young person; and
- closing the attainment gap.
2. Broad General Education: Reducing bureaucracy and streamlining guidance

Potential themes for discussion

- comments on the documents published in August - the Statement, and benchmarking information
- how best to avoid ‘tick box’ approaches when implementing curriculum advice
- further plans for simplification and clarification
- attempts to reduce bureaucracy since the Working Group report in 2013

Throughout the development of CfE there have been concerns from teachers about the volume and quality of guidance provided. There are particular issues around the assessment requirements for SQA qualifications and these are addressed in the next section.

There have been long standing concerns about the bureaucracy that has built up in response and the effect this has on workload. In 2013 a Ministerial Working Group reported on tackling bureaucracy. A follow up report was issued in 2015. This found that:

progress has been made but more needs to be done.

[...]

It is essential that we work together to ensure that Curriculum for Excellence focuses on high quality learning and teaching rather than the fruitless management of pointless paperwork. The best way to do this is through simplifying processes and focusing on key priorities

One of the OECD’s recommendations from its 2015 review was:

Simplify and clarify core guidance, including in the definitions of what constitutes the Curriculum for Excellence

The Delivery Plan on Education includes a number of measures intended to streamline guidance and reduce bureaucracy. Actions already completed include:

- Education Scotland statement on CfE. Published 26th August.
- Education Scotland draft ‘benchmarking’ information, providing specific examples of how to evidence achievement of Experiences and Outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Published 26th August 2016.

An accompanying letter from John Swinney stated that:

I accept in the last few years, that time has become cluttered by a plethora of guidance and advice that, however well intentioned has led to increased workload, confusion and duplication. I am determined to tackle that problem.
The attached note from HM Chief Inspector of Education is being sent to every teacher in Scotland to give absolute clarity about what is and what is not required of you. It is intended to place you in a position to know without doubt what you should and should not be asked to do. It is clear and simple and is the definitive piece of guidance which you should use.

Education Scotland has conducted a short review of:

“the demands placed on schools by local authorities in relation to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), particularly around their arrangements for curriculum, planning, assessment and reporting in schools.”

It found that across the country, the areas requiring most improvement are:

- tracking and monitoring of learners’ progress, particularly in the broad general education; and
- the development of IT systems to support effective tracking and monitoring.

The Herald reported (20th September) that COSLA and ADES contested the findings. COSLA said that: “it is ironic that workload issue was created in large part by the agency sent in to sort out the problem”.

Further action, set out in the Delivery Plan includes:

- benchmarking information on Experiences and Outcomes for all curriculum areas. By end 2016
- streamlined set of resources available on the National Improvement Hub. By January 2017
- “formulate a more intense new programme of reducing workload in schools”. Overseen directly by the Deputy First Minister.

3. Senior Phase: Assessment of National Qualifications

Potential themes for discussion:

- any remaining issues around assessment workload following the agreement on unit assessments.
- place of external assessment in the perceived value of a qualification

A long standing issue with Curriculum for Excellence has been the workload generated for teachers in relation to the new qualifications. Most recently in Education Scotland’s review of local authority imposed workload (20th September 2016): “all secondary headteachers and teachers reported that new SQA examination arrangements had caused additional workload.”
**Agreement on unit assessments**
The Working Group on Assessment and Qualifications has proposed to end unit assessments in National 5 (from 2017/18) and Highers (from 2018/19). Detailed proposals will be discussed by the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board (Scottish Government, 21st September).

National 5 and Higher courses are made up of units (normally 3 units) and a course assessment. Currently all units must be passed as well as the course assessment. For example History National 5 is made up of:

- Three units. One each on Scottish, British and World history. Pupils must pass each unit.
- Course assessment, made up of an assignment (25%) and exam (75%). The final grade is based on the course assessment.

The workload created by marking unit assessments was a major factor in the vote for industrial action (see below). The Herald has reported (22nd September) that the EIS is considering suspending its ‘work to rule’ following this agreement.

The SQA explained how the agreement would lead to changes in course arrangements:

If the proposal is agreed by the CfE Management Board, the achievement of a National Course would be based on a revised Course assessment, which would increase the sampling of course content. This would mean that each exam would be extended and the Coursework may be modified or new Coursework may be introduced in some areas. This would be implemented for National 5 for the 2017/18 session, and for Higher in the 2018/19 session (SQA 22nd September)

**Background on SQA workload and industrial action**
In 2014 the CfE management board reviewed the first year of national qualifications, resulting in a ‘Reflections Report’ which included a range of recommendations. The report found that:

there has been a significant and unsustainable level of over-assessment in many parts of the system. This increase in assessment was not intended, and requires to be addressed at both national and local level.

In January 2016, The Working Group on Assessment and Qualifications was established. Its report, issued in May 2016, made further recommendations and found that:

aspects of the introduction of new national qualifications have involved an unintended and unsustainable level of work for learners and teachers.

Some teacher unions were disappointed by the report. The EIS agreed to taking industrial action in relation to SQA workload. The SSTA is holding a formal ballot of their members during September.

Changes sought by the EIS include:

The EIS is demanding early decisions about the more significant changes that need to be made to achieve a satisfactory outcome, in particular the place of mandatory
unit assessments at Nat 5 and 6; the issue of an external exam at Nat 4; and the interface between BGE and the Senior Phase.

In June, the EIS sent the Cabinet Secretary a list of suggestions for reducing workload. [Available here](#). This 42 page report covers workload across all school policy areas, including that generated by National Qualifications.

Action taken to date includes 51 subject reviews published by SQA in May 2016. [Available here](#). Following these reports, some changes were made to assessment requirements for 2016/17. The Working Group was reconvened in August and, as mentioned above, has agreed to remove unit assessments from National 5 and Higher.

Further action on workload as set out in the Delivery Plan includes SQA consultation from September 2016 on streamlining course documentation.

**National 4: no external assessment**

Another issue in relation to senior phase qualifications is the perceived value of National 4. For example, the SSTA claimed in 2014 that parents do not attach as much value to National 4 as National 5 because it does not have an external exam ([Telegraph, 22nd February 2014](#)). Similar issues were raised this year (See [Herald, 23rd August 2016](#)).

The SQA explain in their FAQs why National 4 does not have an external exam:

National 4 follows a similar model to the Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND), which do not have exams and are internally assessed. There is also a number of National 5 and Higher Courses which do not have exams. Internal assessment is more suitable for qualifications at SCQF level 4 and National 4 Courses are mainly assessed through coursework that allows learners to demonstrate what they can do. This will help to build learners’ confidence and prepare them for National 5 or for moving on to college, training or employment ([SQA online](#)).

Following the agreement on unit assessment, the SSTA commented that issues in National 4 also needed to be tackled:

At the moment National 4 is wholly managed and assessed, to the bureaucratic SQA specifications, by the teacher in the classroom. The SSTA view is the workload should be reduced and the inclusion of an externally assessment or exam.” ([BBC, 22nd September](#))

**4. Number of subjects in the Senior Phase**

Potential themes for discussion:

- level of consistency across schools in the maximum number of Senior Phase qualifications that can be taken at any one time
Another perennial issue is that different interpretations of the ‘broad general education’ and ‘Senior Phase’ have led some schools to offer 5 and others up to 8 subjects at S4. In May this year Reform Scotland published a list of the maximum number of subjects that could be studied in schools across Scotland. Also in May, Education Scotland issued revised guidance, recommending schools offer between 6 and 8. The guidance emphasised the number of courses offered is a matter for schools but that learning prior to S4 can count towards the 160 hours expected for the delivery of a National 4 or 5 course:

Although formal qualification courses will not begin before S4, learning which takes place in the BGE can and should contribute to learning for qualifications. This can and should be done without compromising the entitlement to a Broad General Education in S3.

[...] schools should plan for young people to progress smoothly on to following anything between six and eight qualification courses from S4 onwards, with certification of each over a mix of one or two years, as appropriate to their individual needs. (Education Scotland, 2016)

5. Wider achievement

Potential themes for discussion

- recognising wider achievement in CfE
- role of third sector and charities in developing young peoples’ skills

One of the ideas in Curriculum for Excellence was to encourage wider achievement beyond traditional qualifications.

The Education Scotland advice in May 2016 stated that:

Schools should be using the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence to develop new progression pathways to ensure they can meet the needs and aspirations of all young people, to raise attainment and to ensure all their learners move into sustained and positive destinations beyond the Senior Phase. That includes developing new pathways to motivate groups of learners who may have been less well served by secondary school provision in the past.

Building the Curriculum 5: recognising achievement, profiling and reporting (2010) described ‘recognising achievement’ as follows:

Achievement covers learning within curriculum areas and interdisciplinary learning, including recognition through qualifications, but it is much wider than that. It includes achievement in other areas within the life of the school and outside the school – sometimes referred to as wider achievement. Achievement beyond formally assessed learning in the classroom can take a range of forms. For example:
• some young people will achieve through formally recognised awards or programmes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, which provide opportunities for young people to develop their potential

• some young people will achieve through arrangements which do not lead to an accredited award but which are formally organised, for example while undertaking voluntary work or undertaking leadership roles in the school

• some young people will develop skills and capabilities through achievements in the school, home or wider community – for example, through participation in sport, the arts or activities in the community or through being placed in positions of responsibility, such as young carers.

These types of achievement are not exclusive and learners will achieve in a range of ways and in a variety of contexts.

The ‘benchmarking’ tool, ‘Insight’ has been developed since 2014 to assist schools measure attainment. This includes recognition of ‘wider achievement’ where such achievement fits in with the principles of CfE and equates to SCQF levels.

SQA has developed certificated awards in areas that reflect wider achievement. These are listed below together with the number of entries from schools in 2016.

**‘Wider Achievement’ SQA awards. Entries from schools, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Entries</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employability</td>
<td>1,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>leadership</td>
<td>1,878</td>
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<tr>
<td>modern languages for work</td>
<td>2,434</td>
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<tr>
<td>personal development</td>
<td>2,426</td>
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<tr>
<td>religion, belief and values</td>
<td>2,268</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scots language</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish studies</td>
<td>733</td>
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<tr>
<td>steps to work</td>
<td>273</td>
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<tr>
<td>volunteering skills</td>
<td>335</td>
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<tr>
<td>wellbeing</td>
<td>901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal achievement, bronze, silver or gold</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal finance</td>
<td>1,131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2015, Education Scotland conducted a [review of youth awards in Scotland](#). The range of awards available, including those listed above from the SQA is listed in the annex to the report. This includes, for example, Duke of Edinburgh, John Muir, Saltire and Princes Trust awards. The review considered how youth awards in Scotland collectively contribute to:

• improved life chances for young people, through learning, personal development and active citizenship;
• stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities; and
• the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.
The review found that there had been considerable growth in the availability of youth awards and that;

Young people are developing a wide range of skills through participation in youth awards. The skills most commonly recognised are communication, confidence, interpersonal skills, team working, leadership and employability.

Camilla Kidner
Senior Researcher
Schools, children’s services, social security
SPiCe
22nd September 2016