EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

13th Meeting, 2019 (Session 5)

Wednesday 24 April 2019

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in the James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4).

1. **Subject Choices inquiry**: The Committee will take evidence from—
   
   Dr Alan Britton, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Glasgow;
   
   William Hardie, Policy Advice Manager, Royal Society of Edinburgh; and
   
   Professor Jim Scott, School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee.

2. **Inquiry into music tuition in schools - report responses**: The Committee will consider the responses to its report entitled “A note of concern: The future of instrumental music tuition in schools”.

3. **Subordinate legislation**: The Committee will consider the following negative instrument—

   The Teachers’ Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Amendment Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/95)

4. **Review of evidence (in private)**: The Committee will consider the evidence it heard earlier.

Roz Thomson  
Clerk to the Education and Skills Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
Tel: 85222  
Email: Roz.Thomson@parliament.scot
The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda item 1**

SPICe briefing paper

SPICe briefing paper - schools survey

Submissions pack

**Agenda item 2**

Responses to Music tuition report

**Agenda item 3**

Paper from the Clerk
INTRODUCTION

The Education and Skills Committee is carrying out an inquiry into subject choices. As part of this inquiry, the Committee agreed to take a number of different approaches to evidence-taking. The Committee has undertaken several surveys, liaised with the Scottish Youth Parliament, and commissioned discussion groups. In addition, the Committee issued a call for written views and sought information directly from a number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Local Authorities. Write-ups of this work will be provided to Members over the course of the inquiry. This week, a write up of the responses to a survey of schools in 2019 is included in members’ papers (Paper 2).

This inquiry follows on from previous work undertaken by the Committee in 2017 and September 2018. The Committee held an evidence session on 19 September 2018 on curriculum and attainment trends following the 2018 exam diet. Two of the witnesses that gave evidence to the Committee in September return on 24 April.

The Committee took evidence from Education Scotland and representatives from the further and higher education sectors on 3 April 2019. The purpose of this paper is to brief the Committee in advance of the second formal evidence session; the topics under discussion are likely to be similar to those raised with Education Scotland and this paper covers much of the same material as was highlighted to Members in its briefing for that evidence session.

The Committee will hear from—

- Dr Alan Britton, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Glasgow;
- William Hardie, Policy Advice Manager, Royal Society of Edinburgh; and
- Professor Jim Scott, School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee

About the panel

Dr Alan Britton

Dr Britton is a senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow teaching Initial Teacher Education courses. He has wide experience of education including English language teaching in France, outdoor instruction in the Highlands of Scotland, and secondary school teaching of languages and civics.

Dr Britton’s research interests are Education Policy, Citizenship, Political Literacy, and Sustainability. His doctoral thesis was on the development of CfE.
Professor Jim Scott

Jim Scott is an Honorary Professor of Education in the School of Education and Social Work of the University of Dundee. Prof Scott served as a head teacher for a total of four secondary schools between September 1990 and January 2012 in Fife, Falkirk, and Perth and Kinross.

He has published a number of papers focusing on curricular structures in Scottish Secondary schools and the impact on course entries.

William Hardie

Mr Hardie is the Policy Advice Manager at the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE). He supports both the RSE’s Education Committee and the Learned Societies Group, both of which have submitted written evidence to the Committee for this inquiry.

THEME 1: DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR PHASE AND LENGTH OF COURSES

The Senior Phase was the last element of the Curriculum for Excellence to be implemented. It was phased in from 2014 to 2016 and the previous national qualifications of Access, Standard, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher were replaced by National courses (numbered 2-5) and new Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.

The previous system of secondary school tended to be structured in three two-year groupings S1-2, S3-4, S5-6 (further national qualifications, e.g. Intermediates, Highers and Advanced Highers). This model is sometimes termed “2-2-2”. Curriculum for Excellence changed the structure of secondary school to two 3-year groupings S1-S3 (“3-3”), with 3 years of Broad General Education and 3 years at Senior Phase).

Professor Jim Scott is has been cited as a leading researcher in changing curriculum models in Scotland and therefore this section includes a focus on his work. Prof Scott argued in a paper published in March 2018 that the change to the structure of secondary education was implemented without adequate consultation. He also argued that while the 3-15 curriculum was subject of a great deal of work during the development of CfE, the Senior Phase was left to the SQA which he pointed out is “a qualifications body rather than a curricular agency”.

Dr Britton’s submission to the Committee for the evidence session in September 2018 also identified differences in approach to the development of BGE and the Senior Phase. He stated—

“The post BGE phase did not receive the same pedagogical consideration as the earlier levels, and the strong messages about the need to revisit aspects of teaching and learning from the CfE review were not addressed to the same extent.”

The SQA states that there should be 160 hours of learning time for national qualifications. In an FAQ on National Qualifications published in June 2016, it said—

“The national courses have been designed to be delivered and assessed in 160 hours, assuming the candidate was at the correct entry point in their learning. Accordingly, a candidate must be secure in their learning at curriculum level 4 prior

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1 Scott J (2018) Curriculum for Excellence and the Early / Middle Secondary Curriculum in Scotland: Lessons Learned or Forgotten
to embarking on a National 5 course and 160 hours should be allowed for delivery and assessment. If either of these conditions is not met then the candidate will struggle — the time for learning, teaching and assessment will be squeezed and it is likely that more re-assessment may be required. This has always been the case for current and previous courses."

A theme of the submissions the committee received for this inquiry has been how the learning time can be managed while providing breadth. The RSE argued that the reduction in the number of courses being taken in S4 has not been a result of a conscious policy decision but an “unintended consequence of the interpretation of national guidance” regarding the need for 160 hours of directed study. The EIS stated—

“In many/most cases, teaching time falls far short of the 160 hours allocated notionally per course, with learning for what were originally designed to be two-year courses being crammed into a timescale that stops significantly short of one school session. This strongly mitigates (sic) against the principle of depth in learning.”

Education Scotland told the Committee that 160 hours are a notional learning time and need not be all be in lessons, nor does all the learning need to take place in Senior Phase. Education Scotland highlighted an issue of “too many settings with a focus on a one-year qualification ladder” concentrating on traditional subjects. Education Scotland also noted that some schools are utilising flexibility through senior phase and offering courses over two years. Alan Armstrong, Strategic Director, said—

“Many schools are also looking to move away from the rather stale diet of examinations in S4, S5 and S6. We know that an increasing number of young people are staying on after S4 … That gives schools opportunities to design courses over more than one year. We are seeing young people begin to take a mix of courses over one and two years.”

Scottish Association of Geography Teachers’ submission argues that schools should revert to a 2-2-2 model through secondary education – that is 2 years of BGE, followed by two years for initial examinations (e.g. Nat 4/5s), followed by two further years of qualifications (e.g. Nat 5s, Highers or Advanced Highers).

EIS stated that schools which have retained this structure “offer the least flexibility in terms of the range of pathways”. The EIS suggested a 3-2-1 model should be adopted—

“S4-S5 should be structured as per the Standard Grade S3-S4, with eight available options and two school sessions within which the associated learning is undertaken. Not all of the eight options would be National Qualifications, therefore time and space would be created for students to engage in a broader range of learning experiences- community-based learning, Modern Apprenticeships, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, etc. – and in greater depth in some, depending on course and level.”

Education Scotland told the Committee that its role is not to dictate the structures schools should use; rather, it is to provide examples of best practice.

There have been concerns raised that BGE was not preparing young people for senior phase. Dr Brown told the Committee at the 19 September 2018 meeting that “clarity is
needed on the whole three to 18 pathway, so that people can be successful when they get to the [Senior Phase] courses”. Dr Brown also indicated that the SQA’s research had shown that the pace of work in S3 had increased recently and the jump in pace in S4 had reduced. The 2017/18 Achievement of CfE Levels data indicated that while 87% and 89% of S3 students reached level 3 or better in literacy and numeracy respectively at the end of 2017/18, 46% and 56% reached level 4. Professor Scott’s submission noted that “curricular levels and attainment levels are not the same”.

Multi-level classes were also mentioned by respondents to the Committee’s call for views. One teacher, Iain Aitken, described these classes as putting “totally unrealistic demands” on teachers. The Learned Societies Group said—

“Science teachers have expressed concern that multi-course teaching does not allow them to fully support the needs and aspirations of pupils undertaking different levels of national qualifications. While the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and SQA recognise the challenges posed by multi-course teaching, it is not clear what action is being taken to address this issue.”

The Committee may wish to explore with the panel:

- How National Qualifications and the broader suite of courses offered throughout Senior Phase match the aspirations for Curriculum for Excellence.
- How the notional teaching time of courses have impacted on the number of courses that can be taken in S4 or over the whole of Senior Phase.
- What evidence is there that schools and local authorities are utilising flexibility in presentations, e.g. bypassing Nat 5s or offering two-year courses.
- The relative strengths and weaknesses of the 3-3, 2-2-2, and 3-2-1 models for secondary schools.
- How well BGE prepares learners for senior phase, particularly to take National 5 courses in a single year. How CfE curriculum levels relate to SCQF levels and whether in practice young people are “secure in their learning at curriculum level 4 prior to embarking on a National 5 course[s]”.
- Issues surrounding multi-level teaching and whether courses are designed to support this.

THEME 2: CURRICULAR STRUCTURES AND NUMBERS OF SUBJECT CHOICES

In September 2018, the Committee heard that a range of curricular structures are employed in secondary schools across Scotland.

The Committee’s 2019 survey of schools found that schools tended to offer six or seven National 5 subjects in S4. No respondent to the survey offered 5 subjects. All of the schools were able to offer at least 5 Highers in S5. More details on the 2019 survey can be found in Paper 2.

Professor Jim Scott has undertaken work on the variety of structures employed. His recent submission to the Committee provided an update of the curricular structures of 277 (out of
358 state secondary schools). Professor Scott’s work has, up to now, focused mainly on S1-S4. Forthcoming work expands this to look at curriculum structures up to S6.

In his submission, Professor Scott identifies the most common number of subjects in S3, at the end of Broad General Education (“BGE”) as 11 or 12.

Figure 1: Distribution of Number of Subjects offered in S3

![Distribution of Number of Subjects offered in S3](source, Data from Professor Scott’s submission)

A paper to the Scottish Government’s Curriculum and Assessment Board on progression and transitions⁴ noted that—

“Inspection evidence shows that in schools many young people at S1 can be studying learning across as many as 15 subjects. This presents challenges in relation to coherence and in ensuring that connections are made across learning …

“Many secondary schools need to review the S1 to S3 curriculum to make sure it meets the needs of young people. The pace of implementing the BGE from S1 to S3 has been limited due to the focus on the introduction of new National Qualifications in the senior phase. The curriculum at S3 is susceptible to being designed by the ‘draw down’ from the perceived needs of the Senior Phase and not built on the progression needs of learners to enable them to transition into the senior phase.”

Professor Scott indicated that the number of subjects offered in S3 was not an indicator of the number of subjects offered in S4. In some schools, pupils will experience a significant reduction in the number of subjects between S3 and S4.

Figure 2, below, shows the percentage of schools which offer 6, 7 and 8 subjects in S4. The individual bars represent schools that offer 11-14 subjects in S3 along with a bar showing the percentages for all schools. The chart does not appear to show a pattern between the number of subjects offered in S3 and the number of subjects offered in S4.

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For all schools around 50% offer six subjects in S4. Similar results (57%) were found in the Committee’s 2019 survey of schools.

Figure 2: Distribution of Number of Subjects offered in S4, split by subjects offered in S3.

![Distribution of Number of Subjects offered in S4](image)

Source, Data from Professor Scott’s submission.

The Committee’s call for evidence asked respondents to provide views on what factors impact on the range of subjects offered. Respondents agreed that factors include curriculum timetabling; local decision making; school size; geography and school demography. A number of respondents highlighted the role of the local authority in setting the policy of how many subjects were offered in S4. Others highlighted rurality and size as key factors. The availability of teachers to support a broad range of subjects was also a concern raised by a number of respondents.

During the Committee’s evidence session on 19 September 2018, the Committee took evidence from Dr Marina Shapira whose research with Prof Mark Priestley suggested that there is “a link between the level of school area deprivation, the number of children in school on free meals and the average number of subject choices at a school.” and that this may be explained, in part, by there being fewer teachers at such schools.

The Committee’s survey of schools showed that the most significant factors constraining the number of subjects offered by schools were “Difficulties recruiting teachers with the required subject specialisms” and “Capacity in the school timetable”. This is a result to a similar question the Committee posed in a survey in 2017.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruiting teachers</th>
<th>Timetable capacity</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other potential factors were seen as less influential. These factors were: other resources; parents’ views; pupils’ views; Local Authority guidance; and skills required for local industries.

In terms of time-tabling, NPFS’ submission suggested a move away from the practice of offering pupils the choice of subjects in columns, which may limit the ability to take a combination of subjects which appear in the same column. It suggested that timetables should be developed following a freer choice of subjects. Connect’s submission made similar arguments.

A theme of local authority responses was that the design of the Senior Phase has allowed greater breadth of learning across the three years. That is, it has allowed for more scope to include a broader range of learning and for collaboration with colleges, across schools and with other education providers. This is explored further in the next section.

Professor Scott’s submission outlines 13 “key criteria” with which to analyse curricula. These are reproduced in the Annexe to this paper. The Royal Society of Edinburgh’s submission drew upon the work of Professor Scott and argued that there is a lack of “clear curricular rationale for the different structures adopted” and the “importance of using the appropriate curriculum theory in the design of curricula”. The NASUWT’s submission stated that “It is clear that schools need to receive substantial support (including time) around curriculum design.”

The Committee may wish to explore with the panel:

- What factors should schools or local authorities take into account to design curriculum structures. What the trade-offs are in offering young people more or fewer subjects in BGE or S4.

- Should there be a minimum or maximum number of subject choices. What, if any, guidance should be produced by the Scottish Government and/or Education Scotland in this respect.

- How and whether the views of teachers, parents, young people, business and industry, and further and higher education institutions should influence curricular design.

- What strategies might schools employ to overcome teacher shortages and timetabling pressures.

- Views on how the national framework for Senior Phase performs against Professor Scott’s key criteria for curricular analysis.
• Whether school leaders and local authorities are well-equipped to develop curriculum structures at a local level.

• Whether there has been research on the impact on curricular structures on outcomes for young people.

THEME 3: BREADTH AND DEPTH

There are contrasting narratives around Senior Phase in the submissions the Committee has received. Local Authorities and others have highlighted the way in which a three-year Senior Phase has expanded the types of opportunities available for young people, for example by expanding the offer of vocational courses. In contrast, others focus on the opportunities to take a variety of subjects particularly in S4 – as noted above, typically 6 or 7 – and the impact of this over course of the senior phase. The impact of this on particular subjects is addressed in a later section of this paper.

The Committee’s survey of schools also drew out these positions. One school commented—

“Effectively reducing senior phase from four years to three years (S3-6 v S4-6) has made the challenge of achieving both breadth and depth all the greater and arguably increased the challenge of ensuring pace and challenge throughout S1-3. Those who say we must have five or six subjects in S4 are right from the depth point of view, those who argue for 7 are right from the breadth point of view. Perhaps the solution is to bring S3 back into play. Why do we assume that a10yr/3yr split is the correct balance between BGE and SP?”

Aberdeenshire Council’s submission stated that combining S4-S6, Senior Phase has “created far greater timetable flexibility” and that previously the “S5/6 timetable had catered mainly for the most able” but the new structure allows for a broader offer, including college provision, which means that this now a “far greater emphasis on ensuring that all young people develop the necessary skills for learning, life and work required to make the transition into further study, training or employment.”

Angus Council’s response cautioned against a focus on SQA exam results which, it argues, suggests that “there is not value on the broad range of learning pathways”. Angus Council noted that its 8 secondary schools had common days for college-based learning or Foundation Apprenticeships in host schools. The City of Edinburgh Council echoed these comments; it also has a common “travel column” to promote partnerships across its schools and with Edinburgh College.

The NASUWT’s submission explained that choices of how many courses are taken in S4 impacts on the time available for each course taken, i.e. a school offering fewer subjects will have more time for each subject than a school offering more subjects. This highlights a potential trade-off between the number of subjects and the depth of learning within one subject.

The Scottish Government, local government and others argue that considering the number of choices in S4 in isolation is unhelpful and that the achievement and attainment across the Senior Phase is a better measure. The Royal Society of Edinburgh accepts this but noted that potentially a reduction of subjects in S4 would disadvantage pupils who leave at the end of S4 the most. In September 2018, the S5 roll was 88% of the S4 roll in September 2017 – that is, 12% of pupils who started S4 in 2017 did not start S5 in 2018.
This figure improved up to 2014 and has remained reasonably constant since then. In terms of the retention of the S4 cohort up to the start of S6, 62% of pupils who started S4 in 2016 started S6 in 2018. Again, there was an improvement in this figure up to around 2014 and it has been reasonably constant since then.\footnote{School Census 2018.}

During the evidence session on 19 September 2018, Professor Scott noted that there has been a reduction in the numbers of pupils being presented and attaining at SCQF levels 3 and 4. He said, “the stats show that although there may be some upward movement from level 3 to level 4 and from level 4 to level 5, a significant number of other children have just disappeared from attainment measures, and that is not necessarily because of the curricular narrowing”. (Col 17) He also stated that some schools do not offer certification at level 3. (Col 23)

The EIS stated in its submission—

“Where increased flexibility within the timetable has been matched by a widening of achievement opportunities such as ‘vocational’ qualifications, leadership and employability awards, our members indicate that this reflects fairer, more inclusive prioritising within the curriculum offer than perhaps was the case previously when timetabling decisions rested often on ensuring that Higher and Advanced Higher classes would run.”

There is variability in how many subjects schools offer at Advanced Higher level. Schools may utilise consortium arrangements where pupils take Advanced Higher courses at a neighbouring school. NPFS’s submission stated that parents had reported that—

“The teacher shortage is having a huge impact on availability [of Advanced Highers] and it is dependent on schools working together. In local authorities where schools are working well together, there is much wider choice.”

As noted above, the Committee’s survey of schools asked schools about the impact of senior phase on breadth and depth of learning. Schools felt that depth of learning had improved. There was a mixed picture in terms of the impact of breadth of learning, with respondents highlighting on the one hand a more constrained number of choices in S4, and on the other hand a broader offer of subjects (e.g. Foundation Apprenticeships) throughout Senior Phase. Almost all schools collaborated with a college, other schools or other education providers to deliver learning in Senior Phase.

The survey also found that the majority of schools (60 out of 76) offered a maximum of 5 choices at Higher in S5. The biggest variation was found in the number of subjects offered at Advanced Higher, with a range of 2-23 subjects in state schools.

Professor Scott’s submission argued that the negative impact narrowing of choices at S4 is not on the overall number of qualifications gained; rather, it is on the narrowing of opportunities to progress into S5 and beyond. He said—

“The problem lies with what actually happens when a child pursues a 6-course S4 curriculum. Initial research carried out in several local authorities for forthcoming papers suggests that the average number of qualifications attempted by learners in 6-course environments is around 5 (plus or minus a small increment). Therefore, if anything goes wrong, the learner can be below or well below having the desired set of 5/6 courses to carry forward at appropriate levels and this issue affects the
average and the able as well as the least able. This was also a factor in 8-course curricula but these tended to default to 5–7 courses on average, leaving most children with 5 desirable qualifications (hence the national figure for 5 or more courses at Level 3 being in the high nineties) with which to proceed to the next year. This is not so with 6-course curricula.”

The Committee may wish to explore with the panel:

- Whether there has been a widening of education providers through the introduction of Senior Phase (e.g. colleges) and if this is improving outcomes for young people.
- Whether and to what extent vocational courses have displaced entries to National 4 or National 3 qualifications. What are the impacts of this.
- Whether there is a trade-off in providing a broader suite of courses overall and a sufficient opportunities to take traditional subjects.
- Whether and to what extent a narrowing of subject choices in S4 since the introduction of Senior Phase is made up for in greater choices in S5/S6.

THEME 4: IMPACT ON SUBJECTS

In its call for views, the Committee asked whether there had been a fall in uptake of any particular subjects. A number of subjects were highlighted by respondents, including Art, Drama, Music, Languages, technical subjects and geography.

The City of Edinburgh Council explained that schools in its area had increased the subjects offered in S4 from 6 to 7 as they found “there were unintended consequences to the viability of maintaining some subject areas … modern languages and expressive arts may have experienced reduced uptake as young people opted for sciences and social subjects alongside core Maths and English”.

Modern Languages were also highlighted in the Committee’s survey of schools as being put under pressure by there being fewer choices in S4. One school, which retained a 2-2-2 structure and 8 subject choices in S3/S4 stated—

“I am delighted that our school, based years of experience, visits to other schools in different parts of the world and on feedback from parents, pupils and staff, retained a traditional 2/2/2 curriculum structure. Languages continue to go from strength in our school as do Sciences.”

The Scottish Council of Deans Modern Languages Subgroup argued that an untended consequence of the reduction of subjects taken in S4 was that schools have made the study of languages “non-compulsory”. The submission also drew upon data presented by Scotland’s National Centre for Languages which shows a steep reduction in entries below SCQF level 6 (Higher) in French and German between 2012 and 2018. Spanish entries at this level are on an upward trend, but from a much lower level than French. Take up of
modern languages has also been reported as falling at GCSE\textsuperscript{6} and A level across the other nations of the UK\textsuperscript{7}.

The Scottish Government’s 1+2 policy aims to ensure that “every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue”. Alan Armstrong from Education Scotland argued that young people are enjoying a stronger modern languages education in BGE. He also stated that—

“A young person might not study a language in S4 but could pick it up in S5 or S6. Many short courses are also available to allow young people to learn a language or other subjects over S4 to S6.”\textsuperscript{8}

However, Dr Marsaili NicLeòid from Sabhal Mòr Ostaig told the Committee—

“Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has done some research with schools and we see that very few pupils who are learning Gaelic go on to study for a national 5 in S5 or S6. That is because continuity is so important in learning a language. If we are going to promote Gaelic and increase the number of speakers through the Gaelic learner education in Scotland, we need continuity of learning.”\textsuperscript{9}

The Learned Societies Group’s submission raised concerns around the numbers of candidates being entered into STEM subjects. It stated—

“The number of candidates presenting for STEM qualifications has declined over the last five years. While demographic change is a factor, the changing structure of the senior phase, especially the reduction in subject choice at S4, would appear to be a key factor. Given that the total number of Higher entries increased between 2013 and 2018, we might reasonably have expected to see an increase in STEM entries. However, the data shows a decrease in the uptake of STEM subjects at Higher level relative to other subjects.”

The SQA’s submission for the meeting on 19 September 2018 provided a table showing entries of groups of subjects at SCQF level 5 between 2014 and 2018. There was a decrease overall; only Mathematics entries had increased in that period and entries for sciences, languages, social subjects, and technology subjects decreased more in percentage terms than the fall in total entries.

\textsuperscript{6} The Telegraph (24 August 2017) Number of language GCSEs plummets as academics warn students are relying on Google Translate
\textsuperscript{7} The Guardian (16 August 2018) A-level results: foreign languages suffer further slump
\textsuperscript{8} OR 3 April 2019, Col 28
\textsuperscript{9} OR 3 April 2019, Col 47
SCQF Level 5 entries, 2014-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>48,251</td>
<td>46,536</td>
<td>45,856</td>
<td>46,273</td>
<td>44,477</td>
<td>-3,774</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>41,513</td>
<td>44,576</td>
<td>44,790</td>
<td>44,072</td>
<td>3,016</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>Sciences</td>
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<td>54,622</td>
<td>53,339</td>
<td>52,271</td>
<td>50,829</td>
<td>-6,061</td>
<td>-10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
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<td>17,534</td>
<td>16,371</td>
<td>16,040</td>
<td>15,565</td>
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<td>38,555</td>
<td>38,220</td>
<td>36,135</td>
<td>-4,754</td>
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<td>Technology Subjects</td>
<td>22,476</td>
<td>21,840</td>
<td>21,166</td>
<td>20,467</td>
<td>18,283</td>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
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<td>1,184</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>1,141</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>-54</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80,853</td>
<td>75,743</td>
<td>74,030</td>
<td>74,018</td>
<td>71,173</td>
<td>-9,680</td>
<td>-12.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>310,717</td>
<td>298,694</td>
<td>295,083</td>
<td>293,220</td>
<td>281,785</td>
<td>-28,932</td>
<td>-9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [SQA submission 2018](#)

While there is evidence that take up of certain subjects has declined perhaps due to there being fewer choices in S4, a theme of the responses to the Committee’s survey is that schools state that the offer overall is broader. One school leader stated—

“The Senior phase has given us great flexibility and we now have a wider offer to pupils than any previous time and our courses are better matched to their abilities and to their needs. The economies of scale we have gained where we can run classes with S4-6 pupils is key to this. Our staff have invested significant time and effort in adapting our BGE so that it prepares young people for the senior phase and dismantling this would have significant workload implications.”

The Committee may wish to explore with the panel:

- Whether there are other factors that impact on reducing demand for certain subjects, other than limited choices in S4.
- Whether there are subjects which are more easy or difficult to pick up in S5/6 after a gap in learning. If so, what are the implications for policy and local curriculum structure decisions.
- Whether the panel agrees that schools treating 3 years of Senior Phase as a single cohort allows for a wider choice of courses.
- Whether there is a trade-off between opportunities to take traditional subjects and the aim to include a broader range of courses.

Ned Sharratt
SPiCe Research
17 April 2019

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPiCe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.
Extract from Professor Scott’s submission

Criteria for Curricular Analysis

The strategic issues (almost all contained in the bullet points within the summaries of documents 1-4) from the Context section provide a set of key criteria through which the questions (see Sections A-F) posed by the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills committee (after an initial round of evidence in the autumn of 2018) may be considered. The key criteria comprise:

- Is there a clear and identifiable rationale for the curriculum in its current form?
- Is the curriculum sufficiently flexible to provide effective learning and progression pathways for every child?
- Does the curriculum achieve appropriate balance in neither being too overcrowded nor too narrow to meet the needs of learners?
- Does the curriculum foster innovative, creative and enjoyable learning opportunities for every learner?
- Are all the four curricular contexts (community ethos and life, subjects, IDL and personal achievement) appropriately identifiable within the curriculum and accessible to all learners?
- Does the curriculum provide a broad and appropriate range of subject choices for each learner at each stage?
- Does the curriculum provide better progression (than pre-CfE curricula) from one level to the next?
- Does the curriculum provide appropriate breadth, depth and choice for each learner?
- Does the S1-6 curriculum enable and support higher standards of achievement and attainment?
- Is the BGE phase used appropriately to provide an effective platform for enhanced achievement and attainment in the Senior Phase for all learners?
- Have the likely individual pathways of learners drawn from the school’s community been adequately considered in the creation of BGE and Senior Phase course choice mechanisms?
- Does the curriculum enable and support closure of the (poverty-related) attainment gap?
- Does the curriculum enable and support learners in preparing for their future lives beyond school?
INTRODUCTION

As part of its inquiry on subject choices, the Education and Skills Committee agreed to undertake a survey to gather views from head teachers / senior leaders at Scottish secondary schools. The survey is one of a number of ways the Committee is gathering evidence to support its inquiry into subject choice.

The Committee had undertaken a similar exercise in 2017, the results of which were included in the meeting papers for 3 April; one purpose of this survey was to repeat that exercise to see if there had been significant changes in the last two years.

This paper will discuss the approach taken through the survey, the results and will highlight themes that emerged.

SURVEY APPROACH

A short survey consisting of 7 closed and three open questions was issued to local authorities requesting a response from schools. In addition, School Leaders Scotland and the Scottish Council of Independent Schools circulated the link to the survey to their membership. The Committee received a total of 77 responses from these sources.

Most questions in the survey were closed, offering respondents 4 or 5 point scale or yes/no/don’t know response options. Three questions sought commentary. These qualitative responses add narrative to the quantitative data and are a valuable resource of contextual information for the Committee. For this reason, the responses to the three open questions are anonymised and reproduced in full in Annexes A, B and C.

Please note that survey respondents are self-selecting meaning results may not be representative of the range of views of all head teachers / senior school leaders. Therefore, caution should be taken in drawing conclusions from this survey alone. The intention is that the results of this survey should be read along with other sources of evidence received by the Education and Skills Committee in its inquiry on subject choices.

Respondents were asked for details of the school (e.g. name, Local Authority, roll) although answers to these questions were not required to allow schools to respond anonymously if they chose. Analysis using these data therefore are based on a sub-set of the full data.

The final point to note is that the responses to this survey are compared to the responses of the similar survey undertaken by the Committee in 2017. The 2017 survey had a slightly larger response, with 87 schools responding. Furthermore, for the 2017 survey schools were emailed directly, rather than via local authorities, SLS and SCIS.
RESPONDENT DATA

As noted above, there were 77 responses to the survey. Eight schools did not provide details of their location and two responses were from schools that identified themselves from the independent sector.

Excluding the two independent schools, and assuming all other responses were from local authority schools, the responses represents 21% of all local authority secondary schools. Taking only the schools that stated which local authority area they are in, the response rate was 19% of all local authority schools.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of schools that responded from each local authority and compares it to the percentage of the total local authority secondary schools in Scotland by council area. It shows the location of the survey respondents broadly mirrors the distribution of secondary schools in Scotland, albeit responses were not received from all schools in all local authorities.

**Figure 1: Profile of survey respondents (local authority schools only)**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of survey respondents and total secondary schools by council area in Scotland.]

The average school roll among local authority schools reported in the survey was 880 (standard deviation, 369), which compares to the average roll for a secondary school in Scotland of 802 (SD 372).
The average percentage of pupils registered for free school meals in secondary schools in Scotland is 14.4%. The average reported FSM registration among respondents was 14.2% (excluding those that did not supply the data).

We cannot say that the survey is representative of the population of local authority schools across Scotland. Given this, caution should be exercised in drawing generalised conclusions from the data. However, the profiles of respondents does broadly reflect that of Scottish local authority secondary schools. The number of respondents equates to around a fifth of secondary schools. The data therefore provides a useful, if not complete, picture of choices available in local authority secondary schools in Scotland.

A similar spread of schools was represented in the responses to the Committee’s 2017 survey. We do not know how many schools responded to both surveys.

**SUBJECT CHOICE QUESTIONS**

**What is the maximum number of National 5 qualifications that can be sat in S4?**

Figure 2 shows the percentage of schools that offer either six, seven, eight or nine National 5s in S4. Forty-two percent (n=32) offer a maximum of six. A further forty-four percent (n=34) offer a maximum of seven; and thirteen percent (n=10) offer a maximum of eight National 5s in S4. Only one school said that pupils can take nine National 5s in S4.

**Figure 2: Maximum number of National 5s that can be taken in S4**

The mean (average) number of National 5s available in S4 was 6.8 subjects. The 10 schools with the lowest rolls (c500 pupils or fewer) offered six choices. However, there was a wide range of sizes of rolls of schools that offered 6 choices (several 1000+). For schools with a roll of 800 pupils or more, the mean was 7.0. For schools with a roll of fewer than 800 pupils, the mean was 6.4. The data suggests that there is only a moderate correlation between school roll numbers and the maximum number of National 5s on offer.
at the schools that responded to this survey. The proportion of pupils on free school meals ("%FSM") did not seem to correlate strongly with the number of National 5s a pupil could take at the local authority schools that responded to this survey.

There are differences between the results of this survey compared with the 2017 survey. Table 1 shows the data from this survey, the 2017 survey and also includes data reported by Professor Jim Scott in his submission to the Committee (p17), where he examines the curricular structure of 277 schools’ curricular structures in the current academic year and 224 schools in the 2017-18 academic year. The gap between the two Committee’s surveys is two years, whereas Prof. Scott’s work in looking at consecutive years. Professor Scott’s results are likely to be more reliable, given the larger sample size and a more robust methodology (Prof Scott’s sample was not self-selecting).

Looking at both sources indicates that the maximum subject choices tend to be either six or seven, with few local authority schools offering eight or nine subjects and virtually none reporting offering five subjects. Both show a small movement over time with fewer schools offering six subject choices and more offering seven.

Table 1: Maximum National 5 subjects available in S4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum N5/Subjects in S4</th>
<th>E&amp;S Committee 2017 (n=87)</th>
<th>E&amp;S Committee 2019 (n=77)</th>
<th>Prof. Scott 17-18 (n=224)</th>
<th>Prof. Scott 18-19 (n=277)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the maximum number of Highers that can be sat in a single year?

The range of responses to this question was between five and seven. Sixty schools reported a maximum number of Highers available in a single year as five. Fourteen schools said the maximum was six, and two said they offer seven Highers. One school reported that it did not cover S5 and S6. There is no apparent relationship in the data on number of Highers that can be sat in a single year by the size of school, the %FSM or the number of National 5s available in S4.

How many subjects are offered at Advanced Higher level?

Seventy schools provided a numeric response to this question, with several responding "varies". There was a wide variation in the number of subjects offered at Advanced Higher. The maximum is 25\(^1\) and the minimum was 2. The mean number of subjects offered at Advanced Higher was 10.9. For schools with a roll of 800 pupils or more, the mean was higher (12.5). For schools with fewer than 800 pupils, the mean was 9.0.

\(^{1}\) This was an independent school. The maximum for a publicly funded school was 23.
Can individual pupils take all three sciences (chemistry, physics and biology) in the following scenarios:

At National 5 in S4

84% said “Yes”. This is similar to the response in 2017 (83%).

Twelve respondents (15%) said “no”. Those schools tended to have an above-average proportion of the roll registered for FSM. As the next question shows, those that said ‘no’ go on to agree that all three subjects can be taken across the Senior Phase.

At National 5 over the course of the Senior Phase

99% said “Yes”. This is similar to the response in 2017 (95%).

Only one school answered “No” to this question. However, this appears to be an error or misunderstanding as the same school stated it offered three sciences at Nat 5 in S4.

At Higher in S5

84% said “Yes”\(^2\). This is similar to the response in 2017 (83%).

Twelve schools (15%) said “no”. Eleven of these schools had also said that pupils could not take 3 sciences in S4 at National 5 and tended to have an above-average proportion of the roll registered for FSM. Again, all of these schools went on to say ‘yes’ to the following question - that three sciences could be taken at Higher across the senior phase.

At Higher over the course of the Senior Phase

100% said “Yes” to this question. This is similar to the response in 2017 (98%).

To what extent do the following factors constrain the number of subjects offered in your school this year?

This question offered respondents a scale (a great deal, to some extent; a little; not at all) and a range of options. The options were:

- Difficulties recruiting teachers with the required subject specialisms;
- Availability of resources (other than teachers);
- Capacity in the school timetable;
- Parents’ views;
- Pupils’ views;
- Local Authority guidance; and
- Skills required for local industries.

Figure 3 shows the results from the survey to explain the factors that schools feel constrain the number of subjects offered by the schools in the most recent year. Few schools said that recruiting teachers (n=8) and timetable capacity (10) were “Not at all” factors that constrain the number of subjects offered. The identified factor which scored the next lowest response of “Not at all” was Pupils’ views (36). The factors of recruiting teachers

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\(^2\) From a total of 76 schools, as one school only offers S1-S4 so has not been included in this analysis.
and timetable capacity scored highest in both “A great deal” and “To some extent” responses.

Arguably there may be perceived to be little difference between answering “to some extent” and “a little”. However, in offering the options the intent was to provide a scale. And the shape of the responses indicated that this is how the available choices were interpreted by respondents.

Figure 3: Factors constraining the number of subjects offered in your school this year

A similar question was asked by the Committee in 2017 (with fewer options). The results, covering the questions that were asked over both surveys, are similar.

Table 2: Main factors reported as constraining the number of subjects offered, 2017 and 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recruiting teachers</th>
<th>Other resources</th>
<th>Timetable capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does your school work with any of the following education providers to offer qualifications during Senior Phase for pupils registered at your school?

Respondents were offered a Yes/No response to this question with four options.

- Other schools
- Colleges
- Higher Education Institutions
- Other education providers.
Twenty-two schools (29%) responded ‘yes’ to all of the options. Only one school, a large independent school, responded ‘no’ to every option. Responses to the individual options are shown in Figure 4 below.

Almost all (97%) schools surveyed collaborate with colleges to offer qualifications and 88% collaborate with other schools. 49% collaborate with Higher Education Institutions and 59% with other education providers.

**Figure 4: cooperation with education providers to offer qualifications during Senior Phase**

![Graph showing cooperation with education providers]

**Depth and Breadth**

Respondents were asked questions related to how the introduction of senior phase has impacted on depth and breadth of learning in senior phase. Respondents were encouraged to think of depth as being the highest qualification gained and breadth being the number of subjects. Accepting that this approach is quite a blunt and contestable interpretation of breadth and depth, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide free-text comments on each of these questions so that they could elaborate further on their own views on these points.

*Overall, what has been the impact of the introduction of the Senior Phase on pupils’ ability to attain better qualifications (i.e. school leavers’ highest qualifications gained)?*

Respondents were given the following options to respond:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat negative</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat positive</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Figure 5 shows, overall respondents were positive about the impact of senior phase on pupils’ depth of learning. Sixty six percent said that the impact was either positive or somewhat positive, while only eight percent responded that the impact was either negative
or somewhat negative. Twenty-two percent thought there had been no change in this respect.

**Figure 5: Impact of Senior Phase on pupils’ ability to attain better qualifications**

The comments of those who said that depth had been negatively impacted (negative or somewhat negative) tended to focus on the narrowing of choice in S4 and the impact this has “on the foundation for further study”. Of those that suggested that the change had positively impacted on depth of learning (positive or somewhat positive), the comments suggested that benefits had come from a treating S4-S6 as a single cohort, the wider collaboration with other education providers and more diverse learning pathways. All of the comments provided by respondents to this question have been anonymised and reproduced in Annexe A.

There was no discernible impact of the numbers of National 5s available to take in S4 on the responses to this question.

*Overall, what has been the impact of the introduction of the Senior Phase on the breadth of pupils’ attainment (i.e. number of subjects studied)?*

The format and choices for this question was the same as the previous question. There was a much more mixed response to this question, with 34% answering that the impact of senior phase on breadth had been negative or somewhat negative, 27% said there had been no change, and 38% had said that it had been somewhat positive or positive.
The comments from those that responded that breadth had been negatively impacted (negative and somewhat negative) tended to focus on the number of national qualifications that could be taken in S4, a number particularly highlighted the impact on modern languages. A number of responses acknowledged that breadth in terms of the number of courses that could be taken had reduced S4, but some comments do not suggest that the respondents a negative outcome overall. Two comments below illustrate some of the range of responses of those who responded that breadth had been negatively impacted.

“We have found that art, music and languages have particularly suffered.”

“There has been a reduction from 8 Standards/Intermediates to 6 National so factually, there has been a reduction in S4. Thereafter, our model levels out and pupils can complete the same number of qualifications overall. The benefit is that we can now offer 6 Highers in S5. Consortia and the breadth of in school offer is significantly improved.”

Of those who said that there had been no change in terms of breadth, some said that they did not change their approach to the curriculum, and others suggest that other factors have influenced breadth rather than the instruction of senior phase, mentioning preparation in BGE, resources and teacher shortages.

Of those that answered that there had been a positive impact in terms of breadth, the comments tended to highlight the full 3-year experience provided more breadth, that the range of courses is greater (e.g. more vocational options), and that there are greater opportunities for partnership with colleges, other schools and HEIs. A number acknowledged that a reduction in courses in S4 could have a negative impact.

All of the comments are anonymised and included in Annexe B.

**Do you have plans to make any of the following changes**

The survey asked if there were plans to make changes in three areas:
- The number of courses that could be taken in S4.
- Opportunities to take Highers in a subject without first taking a National 5 qualification.
- Opportunities to take 3 sciences in a single year.

A summary of responses is presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Plans to make changes to subject choices**

Just over a quarter of respondents said that they did have plans to make changes to the number of courses available in S4, while two thirds said they did not. Of those schools that said 'yes', nine currently offer six National 5s in S4; a further nine offer seven National 5s in S4 and two offer eight National 5s in S4. There did not appear to be a pattern of school size, %FSM or location for the schools that answered 'yes' or 'no' to this question. Courses in responses to this question may refer to non-NQ subjects.

**Increase the number of courses that can be taken in S4**

More than a quarter of respondents said that they did plan to increase opportunities for pupils to take Highers within a National 5 in that subject, while just over half said they did not. Again, there did not appear to be a pattern of school size, %FSM or location for the schools that answered 'yes' or 'no' to this question.

**Increase opportunities for pupils to take Highers without an N5 in that subject**

Just over a quarter of respondents said that they planned to offer pupils opportunities to do three sciences in one year, while more than half did they did not. All of the schools that said 'yes' also indicated that pupils could currently take 3 sciences in a single year at both National 5 and Higher. It is unclear therefore how to interpret the responses to this.
question. The responses may refer to changing the opportunities to study sciences in ways other than the number of NQs that can be taken in a single year.

Comments in answer to the next question suggested that taking three sciences in a single year may not be advisable. One respondent said:

As a school, we would not recommend any young person study more than two sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) in any one year. No HE/FE course currently requires this as an entry requirement. We believe that it is not always advisable to narrow an individual curriculum to such an extent - pupil preferences change and as courses progress, difficulties not previously experienced can occur.

Do you wish to make any comments about subject choice in Senior Phase or BGE?

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide general comments on Senior Phase and BGE. These are reproduced in Annexe C. There were a wide range of views expressed. Some themes are highlighted below. Looking back on the comments received by the Committee in its 2017 survey show that similar, and similarly diverse views, were evident then too.

Staffing and resources

A number of respondents highlighted staffing as a particular barrier. For example:

The biggest constraint on subject flexibility is nothing to do with the questions you have asked. Indeed, it is everything to do with staffing formulas and the reduction in several years ago.

Due to financial constraints there is an increasing challenge in providing a diverse range of curriculum pathways from BGE through to Senior Phase. We also find it difficult to recruit appropriately qualified teachers in STEM subjects.

The impact of constantly reducing budgets is still to be fully felt. Government and local authority councillors making cuts to school staffing and budgets will start to bite and we will see subjects having to drop out of the curriculum because of those cuts.

2-2-2 or 3-year Senior Phase?

A number of comments referred to 2-2-2 structure and others praised the combined 3-year senior phase:

I am delighted that our school, based years of experience, visits to other schools in different parts of the world and on feedback from parents, pupils and staff, retained a traditional 2/2/2 curriculum structure. Languages continue to go from strength in our school as do Sciences.

Previous high emphasis placed on the final year of the BGE has left many middle leaders wary of progressing students at a more natural pace in preparation for the senior phase. This is a particular concern for subjects which are more knowledge rather than skills based. The knowledge required to complete a National 5 can be too extensive for students who require additional time to consolidate this if they were to study 7 Nat 5’s in S4 rather than 6 and for many of us, that is the majority of our student cohort. The only solutions we have seen that actually work are either
reverting back to a 2+2+2 model or increasing the time for each subject in the senior phase, thereby reducing the number of subjects.

The mandatory split between the BGE and SP has not created the more balanced approach to learning that was intended. S4 has become too much of a compressed year delivering qualifications or schools are fudging the S3/4 divide to create the time necessary to deliver NQs. It should be much clearer to all schools that it is for them to determine the right time to start NQs with pupils rather than maintaining this arbitrary distinction between the BGE and the SP. If NQs could be openly started in S3 I strongly suspect that the number of schools offering more than 5 NQs in S4 would rise dramatically. This would counter the narrowing of the S4 curriculum that has happened with only minimal narrowing of the S3 curriculum for most pupils. This would require a re-designation of BGE to the end of S2 but that, perhaps, would be no bad thing.

The Senior phase has given us great flexibility and we now have a wider offer to pupils than any previous time and our courses are better matched to their abilities and to their needs. The economies of scale we have gained where we can run classes with S4-6 pupils is key to this. Our staff have invested significant time and effort in adapting our BGE so that it prepares young people for the senior phase and dismantling this would have significant workload implications.

We moved to a model that enables S4,5 and 6 to be timetabled as one cohort, this has increased flexibility of the courses we can offer and the level that young people can study at; we now meet the needs of almost all young people with regards course choice and level.

The key issue is one of diverse and varied routes through the senior phase that lead to HE, FE or employment. The interesting development areas are Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work courses as alternatives to National 4,5 and Higher qualifications. In this respect a move back toward 7/8 qualifications would have a detrimental impact on these new progression routes that are raising attainment for young people who are not seeking to follow the N5>Higher>University route.

**Breadth and depth**

The additional breadth and flexibility of senior phase is highlighted as a positive by many schools:

The number of subjects on offer is not the issue. It is the breadth of courses available that schools should be focusing on. The development of courses to suit the needs of pupils is central. Making better use of local schools and colleges to increase the breadth of the curriculum offer is one way to achieve this when school have finite resources.

CfE has shaken up traditional approaches to pathways with young people, and their parents, willing to consider alternative courses/qualifications and with partner providers and employers really coming on board in real partnership. For our young people it is a great time to be in education despite the financial difficulties.

Others felt the opposite:
CfE was a terrible restriction on depth, breadth of study, choice. It has not fulfilled its ambition to all. Too many who thought they knew better than parents, pupils and teachers. There inflexibility supported by HMI Reports undermined the ambition of what CfE should have been about.

Some described a trade-off of breadth and depth and one called for greater central guidance on the senior phase:

HMIE refuses to say which senior phase curriculum models are positive exemplars and stresses instead the paramount importance of local context. This is understandable at one level by can be at the cost of national clarity. We should perhaps revisit at a national level the discussion about breadth at S4 level. Effectively reducing senior phase from four years to three years (S3-6 v S4-6) has made the challenge of achieving both breadth and depth all the greater and arguably increased the challenge of ensuring pace and challenge throughout S1-3. Those who say we must have five or six subjects in S4 are right from the depth point of view, those who argue for 7 are right from the breadth point of view. Perhaps the solution is to bring S3 back into play. Why do we assume that a 10yr/3yr split is the correct balance between BGE and SP?

A number of responses argued that schooling has changed and there should be a broader focus on what is important in senior phase:

We need to promote increased understanding of the Senior Phase curriculum as the totality of learner experiences and not just subjects studied.

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research
17 April 2019

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
ANNEXE A

Comments on—
Overall, what has been the impact of the introduction of the Senior Phase on pupils' ability to attain better qualifications (i.e. school leavers' highest qualifications gained)?

Don't Know

The S4 cohort (2018-19) will be the first cohort who will complete the new curriculum architecture at St Thomas'. They have experienced a S1-S3 BGE and then chosen 7 National Qualifications in S4.

Difficult to quantify reasons for Improvements in attainment - not reliably linked to introduction of Senior Phase.

The school has seen generally rising results for some time but it is impossible to say whether this has anything to do with the introduction of the Senior Phase.

Negative

As a school that previously presented students for exams in S3, change has impacted very negatively.

Perhaps self-inflicted, but our school chose to narrow to five subjects in S4, which impacted on attainment, subject uptake and the breadth of the curriculum. Some subjects were eliminated from the curriculum and pathways narrowed. We have worked to rectify this since.

Somewhat negative

Authority instruction to follow only six subjects in S4 has impacted for some learners in terms of breadth and restricts pathway options if learner isn’t looking to complete all three years of senior phase.

Pupils have been able to study less qualifications during their S4 year. Pupils often have to resit the same qualification during S5 which is demotivating for them. Running some classes at a dual level has become more difficult in some areas"

One year for National 5 seriously reduces choice which then impacts later on the foundation for further study.

No change

We did not deviate from a curriculum which delivered a wide choice to pupils with considerable success year on year.

In terms of highest qualifications, probably no change from pre-CFE.

Not relevant

Our pupils undertake course choice in S2 prior to entry to S3. We have not identified any potential gains for our young people by delaying course choice or altering the number or level of subjects which pupils can access in S4 and beyond.
We were an early presentation School some years ago. At this point attainment and achievement was higher than it is now. We are on an upward trend re attainment and achievement but this cannot be reliably linked to the Senior Phase. What is evident is the switch between S3 into S4. The demands of S4 with N4, N5 are significant and youngsters in S3 need some time in this year to begin to prepare themselves for the work that lies ahead in S4.

Our school retained a 2/2/2 model which, in our context, works for us.

**Somewhat positive**

Focus on alternative curriculum options that develop skills needed for moving into a positive destination. Broader range of qualifications - not just Nat 5, H and AH.

Our statistics show a consistent pass rate since 2014 with little fluctuation.

The 3 year Broad General Education has allowed for better learning and development of skills. This has led to better learning and in some cases overall achievement in the Senior Phase. This has been in part due to schools having the freedom to design structures and incorporate pathways to best meet the needs of learners within the individual context of each school and local community and in part due to the creativity of time table arrangements and partnership availability. National 4 has not been particularly successful in engaging learners and the difficulty in determining aspirational but realistic early presentation levels is an ongoing challenge. It is difficult to establish meaningful comparisons due to a number of factors such as the increased length of some exams, the varying components of awards e.g. assignments and also practical subjects that have only recently seen the introduction of a written paper.

We timetable S4-S6 as a senior group and this has allowed us to run a more efficient timetable and run more classes at different levels, which has had a positive impact on pupils being given greater choice and being able to pick up the subjects they want at the levels they want. Transport issues re. access to partnership colleges and a lack of a concordant timetable with neighbouring schools seriously hampers our ability to be even more flexible in the choices we offer to our senior pupils.

Particularly since we returned more choice, greater number of subjects studied in S4.

Narrowing in S4 has allowed for greater depth in those subjects and greater breadth in S3.

I don't believe the introduction of the senior phase has been a key driver.

**Positive**

It has facilitated improved pathways for young people meeting a greater range of learners needs than previously.

Running S4,5,6 together has allowed for greater choice a viability of classes being a small secondary.

We run an integrated 4-6 timetable which allows for economy of scale which for us as a small school is invaluable.

With fewer subjects our pupils have performed better.
I think this is a very individualised question which needs to take account of the importance of the learners’ pathways that pupils go onto. The introduction of the Senior Phase has not had a negative impact on pupils but has enhanced the variety of qualifications available to pupils to enable to them to participate as long as they wish to in a school environment. It has also had a positive impact for us on a much more collaborative approach to the education we provide pupils.

The Senior Phase has significantly improved outcomes for young people. It supports increased learning pathways and greater skill development supporting more young people to be ‘work ready’.

The Senior Phase approach has ensured that the traditional dividing lines between school, college, universities and employers have been challenged and schools have developed more bespoke curriculum offerings for pupils to suit their intended pathway/destination.

The ability to provide a BGE allows youngsters to come back to subjects in S5/6 regardless of whether they were taken in S4. The problem of youngsters taking on too much in S4 with 8 subjects (and then not having progression in s5/6) is also mitigated.

Introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships, HNC’s, etc. have widened opportunities available to our Learners.

No age and stage so pupils can take Higher in S4 and N4/5 in S6 if appropriate.

Locality planning is very effective and has improved pupil choice. Progression pathways are much more suited to individuals than the former system of school only provision.

Given the size of our school, the alteration to the revised senior phase model of 6-6-6 means that we timetable S4-6 together. This enables us to make a much broader curricular offer to learners and still enables learners to leave school with up to 18 qualifications (the exact same number as was on offer pre CfE). We are confident that pupils in our school have greater choice than was ever on offer in the previous model.

Achievement has improved generally. BGE structure is helping pupils to achieve well.

We are about to introduce more skills for work type qualifications and this will further enhance provision in the Senior Phase.

More young people are seeing a pathway through Senior Phase rather than single year achievement meaning that S6 in particular is becoming more meaningful and productive.

3 year senior phase means many learners can take subjects at the level appropriate for their stage, not constricted to their age. E.g. we have many learners sitting Higher in S4, or N5 in S6. This is because we have a true Senior Phase with classes populated by learners from all 3 years. Also, by having a common timetable across 3 years we can collaborate with partners such as [colleges] to offer 200 learners/year a blended school College experience, including 40+ Foundation Apprenticeships.

Our school has continued to improve in terms of number of Higher qualifications being achieved by a greater number of young people.

We have been able to offer a wider range of courses through the economies of scale in running S4-6 as one block.
Requires a common schematic over a number of schools.

Improved attainment over a 5-year period - this is not necessarily down to just the introduction of the Senior Phase.
ANNEXE B

Comments on—

Overall, what has been the impact of the introduction of the Senior Phase on the breadth of pupils’ attainment (i.e. number of subjects studied)?

Don’t Know

Pupils will have chosen 8 standard grades, this is now 6 nationals as per the guidance we are asked to follow (though not all Schools). So the impact at a simple level is less breadth. That said, pupils need more time as the demands of N5 are pitched at a higher level than that of SG band 1/2. There is a knock on where in S6 a pupil may have exhausted their 6 N5’s... taken 5 of them onto Higher.....thus leaving 1 subject for S6. Most Schools ask S6 to take 3 or 4 so this means taking subjects you last studied in S2/3. It is difficult to know the exact impact - our attainment has stayed fairly static until last summer with S4.

Negative

Subjects such as Art, Music, Modern Languages have been impacted most.

Having been inspected at the time of the Mantra for changing from 2+2+2, we were forced to change to 6 subjects in S4. Sadly, what this means is the wider interest subjects get dropped. Languages clearly being an example. They rarely get picked up again later.

As above: [As a school that previously presented students for exams in s3, change has impacted very negatively.]

Somewhat negative

Only 6 N5s in S4, so not as great breath.

CfE has led to a move away from an approach that ensured breadth until the end of S4 by stipulating that pupils take courses covering a range of curricular areas. This can increase opportunities for specialisation e.g. 3 sciences, but can impact negatively on other subject areas - in our school most Modern Languages. Where schools have gone to 5 or 6 courses in S4 this problem can become more acute.

In S4 only to be honest but we do have a number of pupils who leave at the end of S4.

We have found that art, music and languages have particularly suffered.

Six subjects in S4 has narrowed traditional subject choice achievement here, however using creative approaches there are other courses which add to the overall portfolio of qualifications achieved.

As above [Pupils have been able to study less qualifications during their S4 year. Pupils often have to resit the same qualification during S5 which is demotivating for them. Running some classes at a dual level has become more difficult in some areas]

Single cohort of S4-6 can homogenise options choices re number of subjects.

Reduction from 8 to 7 in S4, however well justified, inevitably reduces the number of qualifications available.
Previously would have chosen 7 standard grades

There has been a reduction from 8 Standards/Intermediates to 6 National so factually, there has been a reduction in S4. Thereafter, our model levels out and pupils can complete the same number of qualifications overall. The benefit is that we can now offer 6 Highers in S5. Consortia and the breadth of in school offer is significantly improved.

Moving to 6 in S4 may limit options in S5/6.

We have slightly reduced the maximum number of NQs in S4 from 8 to 7 but other than that there has been no impact on breadth of attainment.

It was negative because of decisions taken by the HT at the time to narrow the curriculum. Subsequent HT’s have reversed the decision to narrow and we are seeing an improvement in the breadth of our offering.

We have reduced the number of qualifications possible in S4 to seven. However, we continue to offer flexibility by considering individual strengths - e.g. young people who have additional language skills are encouraged to achieve an additional qualification, either at Nat5 or Higher.

Negative: one less subject compared with S grade

The school has plans to move from 6 subjects in S4 from the current model that allows 6. (Sic)

No change

We did not deviate from a curriculum which delivered a wide choice to pupils with considerable success year on year.

Does not impact at H level. Reduction at Nat 5 level in S4 for more able pupils, but attainment over 3 years is a much better option for many pupils.

It is not the introduction of the Senior Phase that is the issue. It is the planned preparation in the BGE that is the issue. There are many different approaches to the BGE that may have an effect on how prepared pupils are for qualifications in the Senior Phase. Some early LTS/Education Scotland guidance about no qualifications in S1-3 was interpreted by many schools as an instruction to not learn the necessary skills and knowledge for qualifications; which is very different than taking pupils through an NQ course.

Not relevant.

The breadth of options available to pupils has declined, but this is a result of budget restrictions and a 10% reduction in teacher numbers and not the introduction of the Senior Phase per se.

There was a negative impact in the 3 years in which we operated a combined S4-6 phase with only 6 subject offerings. This had a negative impact on uptake and breadth of attainment. We have reversed this decision.

Retention of 2/2/2 was key in ensuring that breadth of choice was retained.
Somewhat positive

Same a previously with additional vocational qualifications and NPAs for example.

Given the number of Polish pupils in our school we have had success in offering A level Polish In association with a Higher Education establishment over the last two years.

It has allowed us to look at College and e-schooling.

Concern that the options can be skewed to one subject area and not a breadth of subjects for some young people; this causes concern if they change their career path in S5/6.

Pupils used to be able to study 8 NQs in S4 which has dropped to 7. We believe that 7 gives a nice balance which allows enough pupil choice and progression pathways.

While pupils can only achieve a maximum of 7 qualifications in S4 as opposed to 8 (before NQs) I think that pupils can still achieve an equally broad range of subjects if not broader.

Less linear progression with more willingness to try different subjects.

Positive

The new curriculum has been planned, constructed, and implemented with the support of staff, pupils, and parents. I have a parent council sub-group who I have met to analysis the curriculum to ensure the school tries to get it right for every child. I believe the curriculum is positively regarded."

If this is looked at within the totality of the Senior Phase then it is positive; if people continue to look at the Senior Phase as a year by year progression then initially it could be seen to be negative. I don't believe this is the case but people's perceptions if they deal with current education models in "old money" will perceive this to be the case.

We offer between 5 and 7 national qualifications so have increased flexibility. We are also working more with colleges, employers and partners to provide a curriculum that better meets learners needs.

As most of our pupils stay on into S5 and S6 we can offer much more breadth and depth than before and attainment has risen accordingly. We would like to be able to offer an even wider range of options with regard to partnership working with colleges re. Foundation Apprenticeships etc but find that the travel times to these options and the negative consequences on school attainment by pupils missing subject lessons while at college is a concern. Colleges appear relatively inflexible in looking to find outreach solutions where college delivery takes place in a school rather than pupils travelling to college (obviously taking into account that some courses cannot be run in a secondary school as we do not have appropriate resources). Increasing concerns about shortages in certain subject areas is of major concern and will inevitably lead to restrictions in what we can offer- looking at digital/IT solutions is something that needs to be looked at closely and requires proper, sustainable funding- especially as a large minority of our catchment is now supported by adequate broadband connections.

Across all 3 years, learners accumulate a much broader suite of qualifications than the old 8 into 5 into 3 of SG, H, AH.
Overall improvement by the end of their senior phase. Pupils are encouraged to see this as a 1, 2 or 3 year block according to how long they plan on staying and to develop depth and breadth in that time.
ANNEXE C

Responses to –
Finally, do you wish to make any comments about subject choice in Senior Phase or BGE?

We need to promote increased understanding of the Senior Phase curriculum as the totality of learner experiences and not just subjects studied.

An increased focus on the SCQF framework regarding pupil achievement and attainment would further support increased flexibility and better meet the challenges faced by schools. Schools/teachers should be able to meet the needs of a range of learners within classes and differentiate outcomes based on the selected assessment method e.g. National Progression Award or National 4/5 Qualification. Potentially the expectation of teachers to offer a range of different curricula in the same class is becoming too unrealistic, possibly eroding the quality of the learning experience for all learners. The traditional assessment methodology driven by the SQA must change. To ensure ‘personal best’ with regard to depth of learning for every learner, teachers need to be freed of the overbearing assessment shackles of the SQA.

1/ The number of subjects on offer is not the issue. It is the breadth of courses available that schools should be focusing on. The development of courses to suit the needs of pupils is central. Making better use of local schools and colleges to increase the breadth of the curriculum offer is one way to achieve this when school have finite resources.

2/ The number of qualifications achieved is a cultural change that needs to be more transparent. Currently, parents struggle when pupils do not sit the 8 qualifications in S4 and 5 qualifications in S5 because this was the experience of their generation. Foundation Apprenticeships is a case in point because it meant that some able pupils would not sit 5 Higher NQs in S5, only 4. An ethos that signals that the number of qualifications is the aim of education in the Senior Phase must be avoided.

3/ Sciences is not a big issue for our local circumstances and very little need for it in 1 sitting. I would argue this is narrowing the curriculum on offer.

The biggest constraint on subject flexibility is nothing to do with the questions you have asked. Indeed, it is everything to do with staffing formulas and the reduction in several years ago. The school Time Table is harder than ever before to make work due to maximisation of teacher contact time as a result of the staffing formula. This is not consistent across Scotland. A school in another LA can have 10 more staff than mine. This is where any restrictions lie.

Allowing a free choice of 4 subjects in S3 has allowed learners to lay a foundation for their S4 courses. By giving them an ‘update’ at the end of S3 allows learners to confirm their choice as they progress or change their minds.

Although it is possible to study 3 sciences in one year, this tends to happen only after parental request. Pupils are encouraged to keep as wide a curricular choice as possible and are reminded that 3 subjects from any one curricular area can be achieved over the course of the Senior Phase and not necessarily in any one academic year.

As a school, we would not recommend any young person study more than two sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) in any one year. No HE/FE course currently requires this as
an entry requirement. We believe that it is not always advisable to narrow an individual curriculum to such an extent - pupil preferences change and as courses progress, difficulties not previously experienced can occur. However, should a young person with achievable aspirations make a strong case to study three sciences, we would do our best to facilitate this.

BGE is not a good foundation for pupils moving on to national qualifications. The attainment of a level in BGE does not articulate well with the experience of obtaining a National 4 qualification in most subjects. In Senior phase the opening up and broadening of choice on paper is great but in reality this does not work for most pupils who travel between institutions. It is a costly scheme built on sand when we are reliant on taxi companies to move pupils on time. The opportunities for FA has been positive largely because only pupils with correct qualifications are permitted to study. Unfortunately this is not always the case when pupils choose options in the Senior Phase.

BGE was I believe intended to allow for greater breadth and depth of learning but what it did was bring confusion and increase work load.

CfE has shaken up traditional approaches to pathways with young people, and their parents, willing to consider alternative courses/qualifications and with partner providers and employers really coming on board in real partnership. For our young people it is a great time to be in education despite the financial difficulties.

CfE was a terrible restriction on depth, breadth of study, choice. It has not fulfilled its ambition. to all. Too many who thought they knew better than parents, pupils and teachers. There inflexibility supported by HMI Reports undermined the ambition of what CfE should have been about. This has been repeated in the debacle over the introduction of, and assessment of, new national qualifications which continues to rumble on with a bureaucracy which gets heavier with reduced resources, too much assessment leading to pressures on pupils, course that teachers are struggling to cover with exams introduced earlier, ever longer national exams, some as long as degree exams, pressures on pupils with ASN requirements spending 3 hours on Higher assessments, too heavy handed administration by SQA, lack of trust of teachers.

Due to financial constraints there is an increasing challenge in providing a diverse range of curriculum pathways from BGE through to Senior Phase. We also find it difficult to recruit appropriately qualified teachers in STEM subjects. The demands of offering more vocational pathways are increasing and require further partnership working with colleges and local industries.

For clarity, I have assumed "constraint" in question 4 to mean "influence". In Question 8: Pupils are encouraged to progress from N5 to Higher in S5; however, if pupils wish to 'crash' a Higher in S5 for career reasons, this is permitted. Any pupil can 'crash' any Higher in S6.

For the majority of pupils in this school they have a choice that could involve as many as 18 choices over the senior phase. This is a strength of the school and allows us more breadth for more pupils.

Form next session (2019/2010) S4 pupils will continue with their seven S3 subjects giving a greater opportunity to gain an extra qualification. Although the majority of our pupils do stay on to S5/S6 this will benefit those who leave after S4.
Guidance was clear when CfE began. BGE is S1-3 and Senior Phase is S4-6. This was not followed through and now we have a 'blend' of models across the city / country. Pupils in S4-6 are under pressure to perform quickly as the courses are 1 year / 2 terms - if as a School you hold the BGE S1-3 entitlement. We are moving towards S3 being used as a step to prepare young people for the demands they will face in S4 N4, N5 courses as it is viewed in the best interests of our pupils' outcomes and their health & wellbeing.

HMIE refuses to say which senior phase curriculum models are positive exemplars and stresses instead the paramount importance of local context. This is understandable at one level by can be at the cost of national clarity. We should perhaps revisit at a national level the discussion about breadth at S4 level. Effectively reducing senior phase from four years to three years (S3-6 v S4-6) has made the challenge of achieving both breadth and depth all the greater and arguably increased the challenge of ensuring pace and challenge throughout S1-3. Those who say we must have five or six subjects in S4 are right from the depth point of view, those who argue for 7 are right from the breadth point of view. Perhaps the solution is to bring S3 back into play. Why do we assume that a10yr/3yr split is the correct balance between BGE and SP?

I am delighted that our school, based years of experience, visits to other schools in different parts of the world and on feedback from parents, pupils and staff, retained a traditional 2/2/2 curriculum structure. Languages continue to go from strength in our school as do Sciences. For a number of years in the 2012-16 era far too much time and effort was wasted and expended on curriculum structure at the expense of focusing on learning and teaching and attracting and retaining the best teachers. All of our pupils study at least language until the end of s4 and all take science. As a school we believe that a broad based curriculum (STEAM rather than STEM) serves us best.

I am very proud of the curriculum model that we are developing here and believe it to be well thought through in terms of breadth and depth, whilst taking into account the dynamics of the local economy and partnership work with others. I am concerned that people do not have this broad understanding of curriculum models and that opinions that are held or voiced are based on outdated knowledge and understanding of the CfE. This needs to be addressed.

I believe at our school has a good choice however, more generally, I would be concerned about equity of opportunity across authorities, where schools in high deprivation offer fewer Nationals and less choice or that, due to budget cuts, departments just disappear. For example, Angus Council [not the LA that this school is based in] just stopped teaching German. Some departments are also very vulnerable to pupil choice which can fluctuate. There are also some schools where there can be single teacher departments like Classics where if a teacher leaves they can be hard to replace. Within Subject areas for example there can be wide variation, for example at this school offers Higher Politics, Sociology from next session, Classical Studies, Latin, Environmental Science in addition to History, Geography and Modern Studies, whereas some authorities only offer two for example some schools in Angus do not offer Modern Studies.

I feel that the issue is more to do with the qualifications. We work hard to keep going as we have been but do feel that staffing is tighter in real terms.

If we are to continue with BGE in S3, we only have the time to offer 6 subjects per student in S4. If we were to go down the old route of S3/4 as one stream, eg, 2/2/2, we would now not have the staffing capacity to offer relevant courses to less academic S5s who were not
able to take Highers- there is very little vocational opportunities in [this rural area, e.g.] college courses, etc.

In our context, variants such as an integrated S4-S6 timetable reduces options for less academic pupils - real gains for pupils would have required an expansion in teacher numbers of around 4%. In reality they have declined by 10%.

The DYW programme has been successful to some extent and now offers a much-improved range of options following a period of serious decline on the formation of the Regional Colleges.

Countries with a BGE phase do not have national qualifications in the year following. Most have a divergence of pathways for young people beyond the BGE phase. In Scotland the grafting of the BGE concept onto all-through secondary schools with a national examination system from S4 creates a fundamental discontinuity. As the SQA data indicates, too many young people have been ill-prepared for the challenges of NQs and/or have been presented at the wrong level.

Increased opportunities throughout the Senior Phase have allowed young people to gain the necessary employment skills to ensure they are ready for work. In addition to this, staff have a greater awareness of the range of opportunities available at SCQF levels 5 and 6 to ensure progression and attainment which is not always linear in nature. We have bucked the trend in modern language uptake primarily due to a change from French to Spanish as L2 within the cluster and staffing changes that have accompanied this. There has been an increased uptake of music, driven by a recognition that young people achieve positive outcomes in the subject and we have been more proactive in encouraging young people with an interest in music to pursue this subject area and allow for progression within N5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Local Authority is still dictating the senior phase model. In our opinion the school would be better suited with a different model which would benefit pupils from SIMD 1 and 2.

Our council has previously instructed us to move to 6 subjects in S4. Whilst this may be relaxed shortly, the additional resetting of budget and rationalisation of staffing allocations may not allow us to increase number of subjects in S4 without impacting on what we are able to offer in BGE and over a 3 year Senior Phase programme. We also unfortunately face a slightly falling roll with associated impact on formula staffing entitlement. I do also worry that there is likely to be further impact upon opportunities to ensure skills for life, learning and work for all and on wider achievement and experiences offered by staff through 'goodwill'.

Our range of subjects and qualifications offered has increased in the senior phase over the past few years.

Personalisation and choice are an essential part of providing depth in learning. This allows more time to be spent in particular aspects of each curricular area. To promote successful learning and confident individuals, young people need the experience of making meaningful choices in order to develop their sense of engagement in and taking ownership of their own learning. Where we have been able introduce limited personalisation and choice at earlier stages, (BGE) we have seen significantly improved results in the senior phase, increased motivation by learners and significant reductions in classroom disruption leading to significant reductions in exclusions.
Previous high emphasis placed on the final year of the BGE has left many middle leaders wary of progressing students at a more natural pace in preparation for the senior phase. This is a particular concern for subjects which are more knowledge rather than skills based. The knowledge required to complete a National 5 can be too extensive for students who require additional time to consolidate this if they were to study 7 Nat 5’s in S4 rather than 6 and for many of us, that is the majority of our student cohort. The only solutions we have seen that actually work are either reverting back to a 2+2+2 model or increasing the time for each subject in the senior phase, thereby reducing the number of subjects.

Recruitment of teachers, especially in key subject areas is a major cause for concern and is leading to a restriction of options within the senior phase.

Smaller schools also face a significant challenge in appropriately timetabling and this is leading to significant numbers of bi/tri-level classes. It is becoming increasingly difficult to offer a suitable Advanced Higher experience.

Schools are working well together to support options and their is increasing opportunities to work with partners to support options in the senior phase.

Shortage of teachers in some subjects has forced schools to make decisions based on factors other than what is best for young people. The national body overseeing Scottish education needs to co-ordinate its energies on resolving this. Regardless of the quality of learning and teaching, if a subject is not offered the attainment in it will be nil.

Splitting S4 from S5/6 allows more subjects to be studies in S4 thereby boosting choice possibilities beyond that year.

The delivery of courses is being led by the SQA not by the needs of pupils. The lack of articulation between nat 4 and nat 5 in some subjects is very problematic.

The impact of constantly reducing budgets is still to be fully felt. Government and local authority councillors making cuts to school staffing and budgets will start to bite and we will see subjects having to drop out of the curriculum because of those cuts. Staffing cuts has an obvious impact on Advanced Higher provision. Rural schools cannot simply work as a cluster of schools to increase their curricular offer and expect to be successful as the distances between schools is large and the availability of transport is prohibitive.

The key issue is one of diverse and varied routes through the senior phase that lead to HE, FE or employment. The interesting development areas are Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work courses as alternatives to National 4,5 and Higher qualifications. In this respect a move back toward 7/8 qualifications would have
a detrimental impact on these new progression routes that are raising attainment for young people who are not seeking to follow the N5>Higher>University route.

The main barrier to reduction in subject choice is the inability to recruit teachers in particular subject areas: Technologies, Physics, Modern Languages in particular. Effective partnership working has improved choice and the development of Foundation apprenticeships is a positive way forward in preparing our young people for positive destinations. Additional qualifications and awards require to be explored for young people and the senior phase allows this. Appropriate progression in the BGE is also important to allow appropriate choices in the senior phase.

The main concern regarding allowing for pupil choice across both BGE and Senior Phase is teacher recruitment. Whatever model the school moves to, having teachers across all curricular areas is vital. Currently I would suggest that the majority of subjects can now be classed as 'shortage subjects'.

The main constraint is staffing and this remains the case. To broaden the curriculum in the BGE can mean limits in the Senior Phase.

The mandatory split between the BGE and SP has not created the more balanced approach to learning that was intended. S4 has become too much of a compressed year delivering qualifications or schools are fudging the S3/4 divide to create the time necessary to deliver NQs. It should be much clearer to all schools that it is for them to determine the right time to start NQs with pupils rather than maintaining this arbitrary distinction between the BGE and the SP. If NQs could be openly started in S3 I strongly suspect that the number of schools offering more than 5 NQs in S4 would rise dramatically. This would counter the narrowing of the S4 curriculum that has happened with only minimal narrowing of the S3 curriculum for most pupils. This would require a re-designation of BGE to the end of S2 but that, perhaps, would be no bad thing.

The restriction to 6 subjects in [our local authority] has, in our experience, been detrimental to pupils. Many pupils are in effect choosing their Highers at the end of S3, a number of subjects that can be so enriching for pupils e.g. art and music, have lost numbers. Narrowing to 6 subjects gives pupils little flexibility in changing plans.

The Senior phase has given us great flexibility and we now have a wider offer to pupils than any previous time and our courses are better matched to their abilities and to their needs. The economies of scale we have gained where we can run classes with S4-6 pupils is key to this. Our staff have invested significant time and effort in adapting our BGE so that it prepares young people for the senior phase and dismantling this would have significant workload implications. Much is made of the need for 3 sciences and yet Universities rarely ever ask for 3 sciences in one sitting in their entry requirements. They also count Mathematics as a Science. We have had advice from admissions officers that they do like to see candidates for some courses who can show the ability to pick up a 3rd science in S6.

There has been concern over S3 into S4 for many years. The so-called 2- term dash of S5 was brought down to S4 through the rigid mantra around the sacrosanct BGE and separate senior phase. The OECD report published not that long ago, makes reference to the need for a new rhetoric around CFE, which to me sounds as if there is recognition that CFE means all things to all people. Which perhaps, is another way of saying it has lost its way.
This questionnaire has required me to complete information with regards to qualifications that we do not offer as we are only and S1-S4 school. Pupils cannot study Highers or advanced Highers but there was no option to put N/A. Pupils transfer to another local authority school to complete S5 and S6.

Too many schools wisely continue to blur the S3 experience in the belief that progress towards successful national qualifications in the senior phase requires pupils to begin to experience the demands of formal assessment in S3. A bridging experience into national qualifications post-Christmas in S3 is a sensible stepping stone in alleviating this. This should allow certification in free standing units from Christmas in S3 and would be welcomed.

Too much crammed into the BGE meaning students have too much to do to achieve at the highest levels they can early in the Senior Phase.

Too much pressure to offer Skills for Work courses and Level 5 / 6 qualifications meaning National 5 / Highers are under pressure.”

We are looking to increase the number of alternative qualifications in the Senior Phase. This will ensure pupils have greater choice and can select an appropriate pathway that will best support their transition to a positive destination.

We believe 7 subjects in S4 offers pupils breadth and depth. Some pupils have bypassed N5 and sat Higher in S4 where this matched their ability level - particularly in skills-based subjects. A narrower choice in S4 would limit subsequent choice into S5.

We believe that the well-established model that we follow serves the needs of our pupils well. Pupils in S2 are ready to make choices, but taking fewer than 8 - or possibly 7 - subjects would be very restrictive. Many pupils are more than capable of successfully completing 5 Highers in S5 and any fewer would hinder their progress. SQA Advanced Higher courses are excellent and a wide range should be available to all young people in Scotland.

We find that S3 restrictions are having a very negative effect on pupils. Breadth in S1 and S2 seems to work but continuing to force pupils to take tiny amounts of many subjects when they want to be more focussed is having a very negative impact on their view of education, similarly many would like to be able to take national exams in S3.

We have introduced learner pathways in S3 with blended outcomes & experiences with national qualification work. This is brought greater continuity to learner/teacher relationships, improved pace and challenge, better breadth of subject offerings. BGE remains far too cluttered despite promises that it would do the opposite. Disaggregating courses and units at NQs has increased workload. Formal examinations in vocational subjects has led us to look at alternative certification, again increasing workload.

We have just totally reconfigured our curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all learners. My responses are based on the new curriculum rather than what is happening this year.

We have worked hard to increase the number of subjects offered throughout our senior phase over the last 5 years. It is unfortunate, therefore, that with budget cuts and difficulties in recruitment this hard work may be threatened as we look to cut subjects over the next few years.
We moved to a model that enables S4,5 and 6 to be timetabled as one cohort, this has increased flexibility of the courses we can offer and the level that young people can study at; we now meet the needs of almost all young people with regards course choice and level.

We need to move beyond discussions on number of subjects each year to look qualifications at the point of exit in the senior phase. Many schools have moved on from entire cohorts sitting the same number of qualifications at the same time. The flexibility is better meeting needs and improving not only qualifications but also destinations post school.

We would like to offer more subjects but that is constrained by staffing ratios which is not a criticism of our Authority but the reality of budget constraints. We use innovative approaches to link with partners, particularly colleges, and are widening our progression award portfolio to offer courses some students may find more relevant to their pathways.

Yes, a big barrier for some schools is employment rights combined with tight staffing allocations. Allowing me to appoint two or three additional teachers would let me manage expanding the breadth of my curriculum offering, but in order to do so, I would need a two or three year transition period, whereby I could phase in the introduction of subjects not currently on offer. At the moment, I need to declare staff surplus in subjects with declining uptake, and replace them immediately with a new teacher. A phased process would only be possible if the local authority allow me a period of grace to overstaff and then resettle once clear patterns with all subjects available become clear.
Education and Skills Committee

13th Meeting, 2019 (Session 5), Wednesday, 24 April 2019

Subject Choices – submissions pack

1. Submissions from two of the three witnesses are reproduced below:

   - Professor Jim Scott, School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee;
   - William Hardie, Policy Advice Manager, Royal Society of Edinburgh;

Additional submissions

2. A letter and supplementary information have been provided from Universities Scotland following the evidence session on 3 April.

   - Letter to the Convener from Alastair Sim Universities Scotland

The following documents are referred to in the letter from Universities Scotland.

   - Commissioner for Fair Access discussion paper: retention, outcomes and destinations
   - Scottish Government Fair Access: Analysis of school leaver attainment by SIMD quintile
Professor Jim Scott, University of Dundee

*Curriculum for Excellence and Subject Choice*

_A Parliamentary Evidence Paper_

_Submission made on behalf of the School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee_

Author: Professor Jim Scott

Abstract

The Scottish _Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)_ initiative is representative of many recent international trends in curricular policy. Although _CfE_ suggested that improved learning should be the main focus of the secondary curriculum, this was enacted through high-level guidelines suggesting a 3-year period of "Broad, General Education", followed by a "Senior Phase" (years 4-6) of study for qualifications. Relatively little detailed advice was developed to support curriculum designers, as this was to be a 'local' process.

This paper, one of a _CfE_-related sequence produced by the author, analyses the evolving shape of the Scottish secondary curriculum (S1-6), resulting from national, local authority and school interpretation and implementation of the _CfE_ initiative since 2010. The paper considers the impact of _CfE_ on subject areas, specific subjects and course choice in Scottish local authority-controlled secondary schools, seeking to answer the question:

"How has the introduction of the _Curriculum for Excellence_ initiative from 2010 impacted on curricular structures, subject choice, individual subjects and/or wider learning contexts in Scottish secondary schools?"

The findings of the paper include evidence drawn from all Scottish state secondary schools of significant fragmentation of the S1-3 curriculum, continuing flux in the S1-3 curriculum, significant variation within S4-6 curriculum structures and narrowing or severe narrowing of the S4 curriculum in a majority of Scottish secondary schools. The paper also identifies subject areas whose curricular 'footprints' have significantly to very significantly declined, and some that have increased, after 2013, with evidence of a continuing decline in certain subjects during the period 2014-2018.

Key words
Curriculum; secondary; subject; course; choice; local authority; headteacher; school.

Notes on the Author

Jim Scott is an Honorary Professor of Education in the School of Education and Social Work of the University of Dundee. His research interests include the school curriculum, the nature and effectiveness of major educational initiatives and the nature, quality and effectiveness of politico-educational governance of education. In previous roles, he led and managed the implementation of a 3-3 _CfE_ curriculum in one Scottish secondary school and provided _CfE_ training and/or local inspections of the transformation from the 2-2-2 curriculum to the 3-3 curriculum in over 50 schools across 7 Scottish local authorities. He was editor/co-author of a set of nationally issued _CfE_ curricular publications and led a range of national _CfE_ training courses for the University of Edinburgh.
Research Design

Design

This paper provides an analysis of certain aspects of the impact of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) across all Scottish state secondary schools. In particular, it analyses what has happened to subject areas and individual subjects in the First to Third Year (S1-3) and Fourth to Sixth Year (S4-6) secondary curricular stages. The paper considers the impact of CfE on subject areas, specific subjects and course choice in Scottish local authority-controlled secondary schools, seeking to answer the question:

“How has the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence initiative from 2010 impacted on curricular structures, subject choice, individual subjects and/or wider learning contexts in Scottish secondary schools?”

In so doing, the paper addresses six questions posed by the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament. These questions form the headings of Sections A-F of the Findings part of this paper.

Data

The research has been completed through documentary analysis of four sources of data:

1. a range of printed and electronic curricular publications, website pages and other internet-based evidence from Scottish governmental and national agency websites
2. similar publications resident on Scottish local authority websites
3. a much larger volume of equivalent data drawn from all Scottish state secondary schools.
4. Secondary school inspection reports

Key forms of evidence considered (where these exist) have included national, local authority and school curricular policy documents, local authority curricular, attainment and quality assurance reports, local authority and school curriculum rationales, school handbooks, school quality assurance reports, school transition documents, parental course choice presentations, parent council minutes (and those of other relevant bodies), course choice publications, school option choice forms, school social media pages and inspection reports on secondary schools in the period 2014-2018.

Context

Overarching Issues

One of the major challenges, for academic researchers, headteachers and teachers alike, in analysing the intended and actual impacts of CfE on the secondary curriculum, the subjects contained therein and subject choice within that curriculum is that CfE has been subject to a degree of what military planners describe as “mission creep” i.e. CfE is now being asked to act as a vehicle for a set of purposes which are not entirely those for which it was originally conceived or designed. This particularly true of the secondary curriculum which was envisioned as part of a unified 3-18 curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2004a), was then transformed to part of a 3-15 curriculum with an attached 15-18 curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2006) and now functions as two linked 3-year secondary phases, the Broad General Education and the Senior Phase. This issue of the shifting nature of the secondary curriculum provides a critical lens through which many of the issues identified in Sections A to F below may be better understood.

There is, however, a second issue for consideration in that the CfE documentation provided to schools is not, as such, a specification or framework for a curriculum, as the initiative was initially nationally presented as an improvement in learning, designed to develop the Four Capacities: “successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors” (Scottish Executive, 2004, p.12) in all learners through a process conducted through improved teaching methodology and practice, leading to improved learning activities, with the curriculum largely mentioned en passant, as a construct which would (have to) change
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to accommodate such improved teaching and learning.

No details of, or structures to support, the needed curricular changes are included in the key CfE documents issued to schools (Scottish Executive, 2004a; Scottish Executive, 2004b; Scottish Executive, 2006a; Scottish Executive, 2006a; Scottish Government 2008; Scottish Government, 2009a; Scottish Government, 2009b; Education Scotland, 2016). Such curricular exemplification (e.g. Scott & Broadley, 2009; Scott (ed.), 2010) as exists was largely issued by quasi-independent groups such as the Building Our Curriculum Self-Help Group (BOCSH), a group of headteachers and local authority managers. The limited national curricular specification - in the CfE documents published before or just after the launch in 2010 - generally focuses solely on the Broad General Education (BGE) phase of secondary years 1 to 3 (S1-3), with the Senior Phase (S4-6) left almost entirely to the Scottish Qualifications Agency to specify through their qualification’s documentation. As Priestley and Minty suggest, the focus in this national work was on “teachers as agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum” (Priestley & Minty, 2013, p.1), rather than on any national prescription of the curriculum. This inevitably generates a question regarding the extent to which teachers or headteachers have been (successfully) trained to carry out - and are thus capable of - such actions. This question forms a second lens through which many of the issues identified in Sections A to F below may be better analysed.

Before presenting research, findings which analyse the impact of CfE on subjects and course choice, the evolving “mission” of CfE and the approaches which have been adopted by local authorities and schools in developing a “CfE curriculum” are contextualised through analysis of four key national CfE documents from the set identified previously. The two original CfE documents, a curriculum for excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004a) and a curriculum for excellence: progress and proposals (Scottish Executive, 2006a), adopted a very high-level, strategic approach. The third document Building the Curriculum 3 (Scottish Government, 2008) has been the main vehicle for curricular advice, although this is still high-level. The fourth document, Her majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education’s Statement for Practitioners (Education Scotland, 2016) is a restatement of documents 1-3 in the light of the ‘mission creep’ induced by the First Minister’s prioritisation of equity (in order to “close that attainment gap completely.” (MacNab, 18 August 2015)) and the OECD Report on Scottish Education (OECD, 2015).

Document 1

The first CfE document, a curriculum for excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004), did not propose a structure for the curriculum, addressing only the overarching values, purposes and principles of a unified 3-18 curriculum. This approach culminated in the suggestion that, by providing structure, support and direction to young people’s learning, the principal purpose of the curriculum should be to enable learners to develop the Four Capacities (ibid., p.12). For teachers and schools, there should be:

- “Clarity about what education is seeking to achieve for each child"
- “Flexibility to apply professional judgement in planning programmes and activities to respond to the needs of individual children”
- “A curriculum which is not overcrowded because of too much content”
- “More teaching across and beyond traditional subject boundaries”
- “Time and space for innovative and creative teaching and learning.”

(Scottish Executive, 2004a, p.16)

For learners, there should be:

- “Higher standards of achievement through a clearer focus on the purposes of learning”
- “Better progression from one level to the next”

(Scottish Executive, 2004a, p.16)
Document 2

The second CfE document, *a curriculum for excellence: progress and proposals* indicated that: “our task is to develop a curriculum framework which will support all children and young people from 3 to 18” (Scottish Executive, 2006a, p.6). However, possibly because it had been developed by an almost entirely different group of personnel from the first, the second document withdraws from the broad, holistic vision of the first document, splitting the single curricular framework into four contexts:

- the ethos and life of the school as a community
- curriculum areas and subjects
- interdisciplinary learning (IDL)
- opportunities for personal achievement.

These four areas are examined in the context of subject choice later in this paper. In summary, however, analysis of the publications of all 358 state secondary schools in Scotland suggests that, of the four areas, the only significant context for learning and attainment evident in the documentation provided by a majority of schools is the second, with little to no evidence of the use of the other three contexts for many or most learners.

The second document’s other contribution to developing a curriculum framework is to unveil the idea of Experiences and Outcomes which, as Priestley and Humes (2010) indicate is confusing, undermines the holistic approach of the Four Capacities and is supportive of a revanchist move to a subject- and content-based curriculum. The second document contains a single page (Scottish Executive, 2006a, p.20) on what “might” be different in the secondary curriculum within *CfE*. Of the 13 bullet points on that page, points 3, 4, 5, 10 and 12 relate to curriculum design:

- (3) Greater scope for different approaches to curriculum design in S1 to S3 within clear parameters
- (4) Curriculum includes planned opportunities for broader achievements, interdisciplinary activities and choices as well as learning across all curriculum areas
- (5) S1 to S3 provides a strong platform for further learning and a good basis for choice and greater specialisation
- (10) In due course, changes needed in the S4 to S6 curriculum, to build upon the revised S1 to S3 base
- (12) Scope to plan for S4 to 6 as a single stage with a great deal of opportunity for individual pathways and choice, with continued emphasis on the development of the four capacities

The extent to which these five bullet points have become reality may be seen in the findings of Sections A-F but Scott (2017) and Scott (2018) have already suggested that points 3 to 5 have not been consistently achieved across a range of Scottish secondary schools; point 4 being particularly difficult to identify. It is also interesting to note that *CfE* document 2 made nothing of point 10, a highly significant change (from the original unified 3-18 curriculum of document 1) to a P1-S3 curriculum, succeeded by a semi-uncoupled S4 to 6 curriculum, and offered no detail of, or rationale for, this move. Point 12 was exemplified through a national professional training campaign led by Learning and Teaching Scotland and through the publications and conferences provided by BOCSH but has somehow come to be associated with “the six-six-six model [with six subjects taken in every year of the Senior Phase]” (Swinney, 2018, p.2) provided by a small minority of Scottish schools.

Document 3

The third curricular document, *curriculum for excellence: building the curriculum 3: a framework for learning (BtC3)* (Scottish Government, 2008), appeared after a further two-year gap. After five years of development (and with only two years to go until the launch of *CfE*), the centrepiece of curricular planning documentation within *CfE* confirmed that:
“The curriculum is the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated. It includes the ethos and life of the school as a community; curriculum areas and subjects; interdisciplinary learning; and opportunities for personal achievement.”

(Scottish Government, 2008, p.20)

BtC3 is a commendably concise document. However, this conciseness sometimes leaves the user seeking exemplification (or full understanding) of its recommendations, particularly with respect to a curricular framework within which schools might innovate to meet local needs. The high-level curricular overview is set out graphically on a single page (Scottish Government, 2008, p.13). The purposes and principles of the two secondary stages of the curriculum are described on pages 34-43, although advice on structuring S1-3 occupies a single page and S4-6 only a single paragraph. This lack of detail may be an origin – and perhaps the origin - of the plethora of S1-4 curricular designs evident in Scott (2017).

The overview of curriculum areas and subjects suggests only that:

“Curriculum areas are not structures for timetabling: establishments and partnerships have the freedom to think imaginatively about how the experiences and outcomes might be organised and planned for in creative ways which encourage deep, sustained learning and which meet the needs of their children and young people.

Subjects are an essential feature of the curriculum, particularly in secondary school. They provide an important and familiar structure for knowledge, offering a context for specialists to inspire, stretch and motivate. Throughout a young person’s learning there will be increasing specialisation and greater depth, which will lead to subjects increasingly being the principal means of structuring learning and delivering outcomes.”

(Scottish Government, 2008, p.20)

As may be seen in the findings of this paper, despite BtC3’s drive for imaginative thinking and creative planning by local authorities, schools and others, curriculum areas and subjects continue to be the predominant feature of the secondary curriculum. Given the extent of CfE documentation (but limited exemplification) issued to support the launch of CfE, it is perhaps unsurprising that – with the exception of some bold experimentalists – many local authorities, headteachers and teachers have fallen back on some subjects (although varied choices of the “some” have been made) which they know and understand from the past, although these have been encased in a variety of local frameworks, some of which do not appear to derive from any of the national documentation issued to support the implementation of CfE. Some of the curricula thus generated appear to be the result of ‘thinking imaginatively’, although not many. Imagination, of course, must be tempered with wisdom and the outcomes achieved by schools (Scott, 2018) adopting an imaginative approach are of equal interest.

As will be evident from the findings of this paper, analysis of the curriculum-related publications of all 358 Scottish secondary schools raises questions as to the intent of at least a minority of curriculum planners and demonstrates that, in many schools, some previously significant subjects have been relegated to the ‘minor subjects’ zone.

**Document 4**

Coming 13 years after the beginning of CfE developments and more than a decade after the original statements of the Curriculum Review Group (Scottish Executive, 2014a) and, perhaps more significantly, after the First Minister’s emphasis on equity in education (MacNab, 18 August 2015) and the OECD report on Scottish Education (OECD, 2015), the *Statement for Practitioners* issued by H.M. Chief Inspector of Education in August, 2016 (Education Scotland, 2016) describes itself as a “definitive statement” on CfE. It partially reconceptualises
CfE (as suggested by OECD (2015, p.12)), suggesting that the aims of Curriculum for Excellence are now:

- “to raise standards [less attainment-specific than before]
- to close the (poverty-related) attainment gap [significantly increased in emphasis]
- to prepare children and young people for their future” [as before]
  (Education Scotland, 2016, p.4).

In seeking to achieve these three aims, the Chief Inspector indicates that teachers and practitioners should: “provide a curriculum that is coherent and flexible, takes account of the local context and ensures appropriate progression and levels of attainment for all children and young people”. However, the Chief Inspector indicates that the “appendix to this statement summarises the key components of the curriculum framework within which teachers and practitioners are now expected to teach”. Analysis of the appendix (Education Scotland, 2016, pp.2-5) reveals that it is largely a restatement of p.13 of BtC3 and of some of the curricular section of BtC3. Crucially, it states that: “the curriculum framework, as laid out in the Building the Curriculum Series, remains the same” (Education Scotland, 2016, p.4). As we have already seen, the Building the Curriculum series (deliberately) did not provide a detailed description of courses or choice processes and thus does not entirely assist headteachers, teachers and communities faced with freedom to design “their own” curriculum and to “think imaginatively”. Since such processes take place in consultation with staff, parents, pupils and the wider community, it is unfortunate that not all of them may be well-placed to participate in such a debate.

The Chief Inspector noted that a number of challenges remained to be overcome if CfE was to be successfully implemented. The first of these is that: “there is currently too much support material and guidance for practitioners. “Whilst this is true in generality, it is not true of curriculum design and the processes of course choice, as evidenced by the four key documents. The Education Scotland website also contains fairly general advice on the curriculum, although the Updated Guidance document on Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase (Education Scotland, 2012) does contain some worthwhile curricular design advice for schools. Unfortunately, much of this advice was not originally available to schools, headteachers and teachers at the launch of CfE.

Criteria for Curricular Analysis

The strategic issues (almost all contained in the bullet points within the summaries of documents 1-4) from the Context section provide a set of key criteria through which the questions (see Sections A-F) posed by the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills committee (after an initial round of evidence in the autumn of 2018) may be considered.

The key criteria comprise:

- Is there a clear and identifiable rationale for the curriculum in its current form?
- Is the curriculum sufficiently flexible to provide effective learning and progression pathways for every child?
- Does the curriculum achieve appropriate balance in neither being too overcrowded nor too narrow to meet the needs of learners?
- Does the curriculum foster innovative, creative and enjoyable learning opportunities for every learner?
- Are all the four curricular contexts (community ethos and life, subjects, IDL and personal achievement) appropriately identifiable within the curriculum and accessible to all learners?
- Does the curriculum provide a broad and appropriate range of subject choices for each learner at each stage?
- Does the curriculum provide better progression (than pre-CfE curricula) from one level to the next?
- Does the curriculum provide appropriate breadth, depth and choice for each learner?
• Does the S1-6 curriculum enable and support higher standards of achievement and attainment?
• Is the BGE phase used appropriately to provide an effective platform for enhanced achievement and attainment in the Senior Phase for all learners?
• Have the likely individual pathways of learners drawn from the school’s community been adequately considered in the creation of BGE and Senior Phase course choice mechanisms?
• Does the curriculum enable and support closure of the (poverty-related) attainment gap?
• Does the curriculum enable and support learners in preparing for their future lives beyond school?

Although these criteria are derived directly from the four CfE documents considered in the Context section, they also appear to fit well with relevant Challenge Questions from “How Good Is Our School? (version 4) (Education Scotland, 2015) and with those set out in Sections A-F. The criteria will therefore be used appropriately in the remainder of this paper.

Findings Related to Questions Posed by the Education and Skills Committee

Previous papers (e.g. Priestley & Humes, 2010; Scott, 2015; Scott, 2017; Scott, 2018) have addressed some of the key criteria listed in the previous section. Their findings have included illustrating an absence of sound theoretical underpinning for CfE and an apparent lack of effective national governance of CfE. The last two papers demonstrated a lack of clarity in the construction of the S1-4 curriculum in a minority of secondary schools, curricular overcrowding in the S1-3 curriculum of at least a minority of schools, curriculum narrowing in a majority of S4 curricula, lower standards of attainment for average-ability and (particularly) lower ability learners, as well as some unusual approaches to progression in a small minority of secondary schools.

This paper progresses the analysis of CfE, suggesting that there is now far more complexity in the structure and range of subjects and course choices available in many Scottish schools than before CfE, although a not-insignificant minority of schools adheres closely or quite closely to previous practice, albeit not necessarily overtly. Conversely, despite the increased complexity, some key subject areas appear to have significantly declined with potential issues for the future of Scotland’s economy, ability to operate in a world environment and cultural life. For the individual learner, the range and quality of choices available to them very much depends on the school and geographical location in which their learning takes place.

The following sections of findings of the paper are keyed to a set of questions posed by the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Section A: Has the structure of the Senior Phase of the Curriculum for Excellence allowed for better learning and overall achievement than previously?

Better Learning

The two aspects of this question are closely interlinked. The “better learning” aspect of the question is the more challenging, not least because there are ontological, epistemological and philosophical issues attached to the meaning of “better”. There is also an issue related to the outcomes from “better” learning: should learning be “better” for the individual learner, for society or for other groups such as employers or governments? A glib answer would be “all of these”, but necessarily there must be a hierarchy – of intent and of outcomes.
Those for whose benefit “better” learning should be targeted include (in order of importance):

- The learner her/himself
- Their family
- The local community
- The wider community (“society”)
- Others who hope to gain materially from the learner’s successes (e.g. future employers – through improved product range, market share and/or profit; governments, through increased production, market share and/or taxation)

Clearly, it this hierarchy is agreed (and it is not clear if all schools do agree with this as only a small minority of schools offer a rationale for their curricular provision), then the focus of each school curriculum must primarily be on the development of every individual learner (as curricular policies in Scotland and internationally have usually asserted). This must, however, be tempered to some extent by the needs of others in the list as, in an extreme case, the production of several hundreds of thousands of experts in cake decoration annually might create enjoyment for the individuals but would only be of limited applicability in strengthening local communities, companies or the national economy (or improving health and wellbeing). Those whose role is to provide each individual learner with appropriate learning experiences (e.g. schools, colleges, universities), must therefore be cognisant of the hierarchy of needs evident in the bullet-point list and must find means of incorporating this in their curricular structures, qualifications presentation policies and support mechanisms. This is not a simple task. It is further complicated by the fact that not all headteachers or other school curricular managers have the same background or expertise in the development of curricular structures, or of the theoretical and practical factors which influence such structures.

Analysis of the curricular structures of all 358 Scottish council-operated secondary schools reveals considerable disparities in their curricula, with respect to the following criteria:

- Structure (particularly in S3 and S4, but also to a significant extent in S1-2 and S5-6).
- Breadth of the curriculum (in the BGE, in S4 and, to a lesser extent, in S5/6).
- Range of options available within course choice processes for the S3-6 years
- Extent of vocational and other non-academic learning opportunities
- Availability/provision of consortium or partnership arrangements to augment school-based curricular provision.
- Flexibility (in meeting the needs of all learners; in offering courses at most or all SCQF levels).
- Provision of information to parents and learners to support their choice of school and courses, transitions to and from that school and progression from stage to stage within the school.

Analysis of school curricular structures showed less variation in the set of courses which populate given curricular structures than in the ways in which curricular structures are created to hold groups of compulsory and optional subjects. Thus, two schools might offer the same overall set of courses but arrange them – and their accessibility - in quite different ways. The numbers of courses available to a learner in S1-6 in each of the 358 schools are addressed in Section C.

Previous papers on attainment by the author (e.g. Scott, 2018) have pointed to issues of attainment and enrolment at SCQF levels 3 and 4. The apparent absence of Level 3 courses uncovered by the analysis of all secondary schools’ publications appears to imply that, whereas a variably small but identifiable proportion of level 3 enrolments could be found in almost all schools (more in more deprived areas) before CfE, these have disappeared from a large minority of Scottish schools since its appearance. There are several possible explanations for this:

- Some schools do not understand that curricular levels and attainment levels are not the same (there is some written evidence to support this in a small minority of school
handbooks) and thus assume that completion of curricular level 3 MUST lead to presentation for SCQF Level 4.

- Some schools have taken a deliberate decision to drop SCQF 3 courses, as it is not their “core business” and allows them to redeploy staffing to provide a wider range of courses for SCQF 4-7 learners (or, in a few cases, to non-traditional courses designed to meet the needs of aspects of the school’s clientele).
- All Level 3 courses have been replaced by courses “more appropriate to the needs of individual learners”.
- CfE HAS resulted in better learning and attainment in many schools and thus all learners are passing at SCQF 4 or above.

Of itself, CfE is unlikely to have raised all Level 3 learners in any given school to Level 4. The evidence of the survey does not suggest that there is a direct correspondence between falling numbers of SCQF 3 courses and increased numbers of alternative courses; if anything, the opposite appears to be true, based on the sample. That leaves the other two possibilities, singly or in combination, to account for the disappearance of courses. This issue will require fuller examination across the full population of school courses and school attainment sets before a potential set of answers is identified.

**Better Achievement**

The “better overall achievement" aspect of the question is easier to evidence. Scott (2018) provided significant evidence on the declining patterns of attainment, particularly at SCQF 3 and 4, although much less so at SCQF 5 and 6. The attainment trends at SCQF 7 appear to be largely unaffected by CfE so far. That paper and the September 2018 evidence paper to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) provide full details of these patterns but there are several points which merit further development here.

Under the Scottish Executive, “better” learning was closely linked to raised attainment for all learners and to the attainment of significant groupings of subject qualifications (usually 5 or more qualifications at a given level). Under the Scottish Government, attainment appears to have moved below equity on the ladder of political importance, with “better” learning linked to increased equality of opportunity and ‘better’ achievement linked to improved standards in three (much) more narrowly focused contexts:

a) achievement in literacy, numeracy and health & wellbeing (although there are few acceptable – or meaningful - yardsticks for the measurement of the third)

b) the achievement of certain SCQF levels by school leavers. These are evidenced through the “headline" publication of results against very limited targets for leavers (e.g. one or more qualifications at SCQF 5 and 1 or more qualifications at SCQF 6).

c) The achievement of SCQF tariff points (as each SCQF-graded course has a points value).

There is much political emphasis placed on “scope for schools to tailor the curriculum to the specific needs of all their young people” (Swinney, 2018, p.1) and correctly so. Unfortunately, almost no secondary schools publish any evidence of achievement in such courses, units or other experiences and such evidence as there is of the actual existence of such courses – whether SQA alternative courses or units, courses from other bodies (e.g. ASDAN or school-created courses -) is only found in a minority of schools. In S1-3, there are only 47 secondary schools (13%) that indicate they offer one or more "non-traditional" courses in their S3 curricular structure and significantly fewer in S2 or S1. Almost all schools, however, appear to make such vocational and other non-traditional provision in S4-6, although to significantly varying extents (often apparently to do with the location of the school and the availability of partners, although a few remote schools appear to have made significant progress in such ventures). Urban schools appear to be best served with respect to “city campus"-type ventures to share learners and increase the range of courses on offer, although school-to-school partnerships are also evident, as are school-college partnerships.
The first two aspects of point (a) are familiar territory, although the subject names have been replaced by the more generic terms; the third aspect is a political imperative from the Scottish Executive era of the early 2000s (Scottish Executive, 2004, p.2) but also an extension of societal concerns about the health of Scotland’s citizenry. The only means used with any regularity to gain an understanding of success on this area, however, are attendance and exclusion figures - which are at best a crude measure of two extreme points of this domain. There is (as yet?) no agreed means of assessing achievement in the wider context of health and wellbeing or of assessing whether the millions of pounds being spent across Scotland in this context (not least by the nine Scottish Attainment Challenge Authorities) are, in fact, being well used.

Point (b) has always featured in SQA results analyses but gained more prominence under CfE as the Scottish Government’s view is that the focus must be “on the totality of what a young person achieves over the entirety of the three-year period [of the Senior Phase]” (Swinney, 2018, p.3). This is a very reasonable concept but, as with several aspects of the eventual implementation of CfE, its execution appears to be flawed. The Depute First Minister suggests:

“Whilst we may see fewer entries for qualifications at lower levels, the proportion of young people leaving school with qualifications at these levels has increased in recent years. For example, the proportion of leavers with at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or better has increased from 77.1% in 2009/10 to 86.1% in 2016/17.”

He also notes that:

“the proportion of leavers with at least one qualification at SCQF level 6 or better has increased from 50.4% in 2009/10 to 61.2% in 2016/17.”

These statements are, of course, correct, as they come directly from the annual set of Scottish Government Leaver Statistics. However, there are issues here which the Depute First Minister does not address:

(i) “The totality of what a young person achieves” is not summarised by one qualification (or possibly more) at SCQF Level 5 or 6. A much more robust method of demonstrating the totality of learning and achievement would be to publish how many leavers have achieved 5 or more qualifications at SCQF Levels 3 to 6 at the end of each year of the Senior Phase (and how many have achieved at 1+ and 3+ at Level 7 in S6). There are issues in such an approach for the Scottish government and for at least some Scottish local authorities as, in some authorities, the 5 or more at Level 3 figure has dropped significantly, the 5 or more at Level 4 has dropped and the 5 or more at Level 5 figure has increased, thus demonstrating that equity may well have worsened.

(ii) The “at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or better” figure HAS increased from 77.1% in 2009/10 – to 82.7% in 2012/13 (the last year of the old qualification system) and then to 85.9% (as quoted on the Scottish Government website for 2016/17) in 2016/17. As 5.6% of the growth occurred in the last three years before CfE and only 3.2% in the 5 years of CfE, it would appear therefore that the rate of growth has almost halved (from 1.9% p.a. before CfE to 1.1% thereafter.

(iii) The equivalent figure for 1 or more qualifications at Level 6 has also increased Unfortunately, this figure grew from 50.4% in 2009/10 to 60.2% in 2014/15 (the year of mixed old/new Highers) and then to 61.2% in 2016/17.” As 9.8% of the growth occurred in the last five years before CfE and only 1.0% in the 3 years of CfE, it would appear therefore that the rate of growth has dropped to one-sixth of the pre-CfE growth rate (from 2.0% p.a. before CfE to 0.33% thereafter).

The SCQF tariff points noted in point (c) are at best obscure, even to members of the teaching profession. Very few parents or lay readers will understand what is meant by these figures.
CfE, Flexibility and Leaver Attainment

Section A of this paper partially addressed the attainment of leavers and analysed the Scottish government’s leaver performance statistics which refer to the more able part of each cohort of leavers. This sub-section provides a further insight into issues with leaver performance by examining the trends in learners leaving school with no qualifications at all in the latter period of a modal S3-4 curriculum from 2009-10 to 2012-13 and then in the period of greater flexibility under CfE from 2013-14 to 2017-18.

The statistics of Table 3 are drawn from the 2017-18 publication of national school leaver statistics (Scottish Government, 2019):

Table 3: Percentage of Leavers Attaining No Qualifications at SCQF Level 3 or Higher, by Local Authority, 2008-09 to 2017-18

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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shetland Islands</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Lothian</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a very positive trend, the percentage of leavers leaving school with no qualifications at any SCQF level had declined across almost all authorities from 2009-10 to 2012-13. Unfortunately, the opposite is true after the introduction of CfE from 2013-14 onwards with two-thirds (21/32) of local authorities having a greater “no award” figure in 2018 than in 2012-13 and almost a half (14/32) of authorities having a worse figure than in 2010. This tends to confirm analyses made in Scott (2018) and elsewhere in this paper that the least able appear to be suffering most under the CfE regime.

There are obvious implications in these statistics about whether increased curricular flexibility within the CfE curricula of many Scottish secondary schools has been achieved at the expense of the least able. Given that, as Scott (2018) demonstrates, Level 5 and 6 attainment is not as adversely affected (and in some aspects, in some local authorities and at some times, has improved), this appears to substantiate the suggestion in the last Section that equity may have been adversely affected by CfE.
It is obviously a matter of concern that levels of “zero attainment” have risen and that this has reached over 3% in almost a quarter of local authorities. It might be that this is due to schools providing non-SQA courses in all curricular columns of their S4-6 curriculum but, since the author has analysed a very large proportion of Scottish secondary schools’ curricula and can find little, if any, evidence of such extensive alternative provision, the inevitable conclusion appears to be that more learners are failing all their qualifications.

Thus, “better overall achievement” is difficult to discern outwith SCQF Level 5 (and level 7).

Section B: Education Scotland says the Senior Phase has the “flexibility to offer a range of pathways that meet the needs and raise the attainment levels of all learners”. How does your school offer flexibility to its learners through the Senior Phase and how does this impact on the range of subjects available and the depth of pupils’ learning?

The overall patterns of subjects offered within the curriculum, both in the BGE phase and in the Senior Phase, are analysed in Section C. Fluctuations in individual subjects are analysed in Section E. To minimise repetition in a long paper, these issues are dealt with only in those sections. In this section, the impact of flexibility on curricular articulation between the two secondary phases and on the subjects available across the BGE-Senior Phase interface is analysed.

Flexibility Within the Senior Phase and Subject Availability Across the BGE-Senior Phase Interface

A significant aspect of flexibility of curricular construction and a major support to the provision of curricular pathways containing subjects which a school’s learners will wish to pursue lies in the articulation between the BGE phase and the Senior Phase. This must be successfully handled if there is to be a smooth progression into the Senior Phase.

Given the unheralded appearance of the BGE after publication of a curriculum for excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004) and without significant detail in progress and proposals (Scottish Executive, 2006) or BtC3 (Scottish Government, 2008), the S3 curriculum itself was almost inevitably the area where most structural change from the pre-CfE pattern would be seen, given the S3 curriculum’s role-change from the middle (certifiable) secondary curriculum to the BGE phase of CfE.

With the S3 curriculum leading to 5-, 6-, 7- and 8-course (plus core subjects) S4 structures, it might be expected that the S3 curriculum pattern would be tailored by schools (or, where the structure of parts of the curriculum has been mandated by the local authority, by the authority in concert with its schools) to ensure the smoothest possible approach to the ‘two-term dash’ towards initial qualifications in S4.

The actual pattern of linkage, or otherwise, between S3 and S4 was first analysed in Scott, 2017) and is shown in Table 1:
Table 1 S3-4 Curricular Progression in Scottish State Secondary Schools (Session 2017-18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S3 Structure</th>
<th>Frequency (f) with which the S3 Structure leads to the Relevant S4 Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Subjects</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from schools indicating 3 of 4 years’ curriculum)

Total: 127 72 25 224

Notes:

a) The pale blue colour suggests that the S3 total number of subjects (this includes PE, RME and PSE) is approximately the same as the S4 total (which does not include PE, RME and PSE), thus modeling the former pre-CfE curricular structure.

b) The pink colour suggests that the S3 number is rather high for effective progression to the S4 total.

c) The orange colour suggests that the S3 number is very high for effective progression to the S4 total.

Table 1 suggests that 11 or 12 courses in S3 is the commonest pattern, regardless of whether students are proceeding to 6, 7 or 8 courses in S4. On one hand, this suggests a commonality within the final stage of the S1-3 curriculum which appears to unite many learners’ experiences. On the other hand, it raises a question as to why students in some schools are apparently able to successfully proceed from such a position to 8 qualifications but others are only able to proceed to 7 or 6 and thus of whether all schools are engaged in maximizing learners’ achievements. Continuous analysis of Education Scotland/HMI reports on schools’ curricula and attainment since 2014 does not suggest that those schools engaged in supporting learners towards higher numbers of qualifications are less effective than schools only offering 6 qualifications.

Of greater concern are those schools offering unusually narrow or unusually wide S1-3 curricula:

There are relatively few of the first category in S3, as curricular narrowing is a phenomenon much more evident in S4. Those schools offering 9 courses in S3 will provide Maths and English, as well as PE, RME and PSE (or equivalents), leaving only 4 other courses. This either implies that the course choice process leading to S3 has largely determined the four optional subjects to be taken forward to S4 (i.e. the previous system) or it implies that several subjects form a rota in one or more of these columns. The latter then becomes an issue of the extent of depth of learning where, say, 6 subjects are fitted into two of these four columns.
It is more difficult to rationalise why a pupil should require 15-20 different subjects in S3, especially where this is a direct precursor to a narrowed (7-subject), or greatly narrowed (5/6-subject), experience in S4. These issues are also evident in S1-2 where, although breadth is a traditional strength of Scottish education, the 1997 HMI report, reinforced by the National Debate (2002) findings – both precursors of the drive towards CfE - suggested that extreme breadth (or extreme narrowness) in the curriculum would lead to highly detrimental outcomes for learners.

This research which led to Table 1 was repeated recently for a forthcoming paper (Scott, 2019a, in press). Table 2 demonstrates the findings of the second survey:

**Table 2 S3-4 Curricular Progression in Scottish State Secondary Schools**
*(Session 2018-19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S3 Structure</th>
<th>Frequency (f) with which the S3 Structure leads to the Relevant S4 Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

a) This table contains data on significantly more schools than Table 1.

b) The ratio of 6-course S4 schools to 7 and 8-course S4 schools is much nearer to 1:1 than in Table 1 where the ratio was 4:3 in favour of 6 courses.

The repeated survey, based on more than three-quarters of Scottish secondary schools, suggests that, although there have clearly been some movements between S3 curricular structures and S4 curricular structures, the overall balance remains about the same. The modal S3 structures of 11 or 12 subjects correspond to English, Mathematics, PE, RME, PSE and 6/7 other subjects. In many of these schools, analysis of the detail of their curricular offerings suggests that this is exactly or almost exactly the pre-CfE era status quo ante, where learners took 8 subjects plus the 3 core subjects. In a significant minority of cases, this perception is further strengthened by the lack of evidence of other curricular contexts beyond subjects or of significant opportunities to engage in vocational or other broadening/deepening of individual learners’ curricula.

**Section C: Do you think there has been a narrowing of the range of subjects and subject choices in:** (i) The broad general education phase, (ii) S4, (iii) S5 (iv) S6?

Identifying whether individual schools or local authorities “think” there has been a narrowing of the range of subjects and subject choices at the various stages is not necessarily a fruitful pursuit. Each school/authority will obviously know their own situation well and can speak authoritatively in that context but, unless they have fully analysed other schools/authorities' curricula carefully, their thoughts on the matter will, at best, be uninformed. The basis on
which any school or local authority answers this question will therefore be at least as important as the answers themselves.

This paper draws on a forthcoming analysis of the S1-6 curricular structures of all Scottish state secondary schools (Scott, 2019a, in press) and is thus as definitive a study as can currently be, given that 222 of 358 state secondary schools fail to explain part, or – in a much smaller number of schools – all, of their S1-6 curriculum to parents and prospective parents through their handbook, website or other means. Scott (2017) provided an analysis of the S1-4 curricula of 224 of the (then) 359 state secondary schools: these were the 224 schools which provided information on at least 3 of the 4 S1-4 years. This paper draws on several forthcoming papers (Scott, 2019a; Scott, 2019b; Scott, 2019c) which analyse the data from a second analysis carried out in the period from October 2018 to January 2019, slightly more than a year after the original S1-4 survey and covering the full S1-6 curriculum.

“Best practice” schools, however, either have their course choice sheets for S4-6 (or S2-6 in a few cases) in their handbooks or easily accessed with good signposting on their websites. The very best link these to curricular rationales, local explanations of the choice process and subjects available, PowerPoint presentations for parents and other helpful documentation. In this iteration of the research, the number of schools providing very good to satisfactory information on at least 3 of the 4 S1-4 years of the curriculum has increased from 224 to 246, a significant improvement. Worryingly, however, the number of secondary schools providing full information on the subjects available in their Senior Phase years, either through their handbook, website or other means, is only 198/349 (349 because 9 schools do not have complete S4-6 provision.

It must be noted that all secondary schools provide course choice booklets and/or course choice forms to the restricted group of parents of children in the year group where that set of choices is made - but this only informs one small group of parents, failing to inform prospective parents seeking to exercise choice about their child’s future education or even parents of children in associated primaries or earlier years of the secondary school itself. Such failures to provide the necessary information appear to represent a breach of Section 2 of the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. These issues are analysed by Scott (Scott, 2019c, in press) in one of the forthcoming papers.

**Broad General Education**

With respect to subjects offered, either as compulsory subjects or as choices from ‘subject choice columns’ not only in S3 but also in some S2 curricula and a few S1 curricula (as choice is now more evident across S1-2 since the inception of CfE), analysis of the data from all 358 Scottish council-operated secondary schools indicates that:

- 261 schools offer from 8 to 25 subjects in S1 (as shown in Table 4) and 97 schools do not publish their S1 curriculum.
- The modal number of subjects taken in S1 is 15 and almost all schools fall within the range comprising 12 - 18 subjects.
- In a large majority of schools there is no choice in the S1 curriculum.
- 259 schools offer from 9 to 24 subjects in S2 (as shown in Table 4) and 99 schools do not publish their S2 curriculum.
- The modal number of subjects taken in S2 is also 15 and almost all schools fall within the range comprising 12 - 19 subjects.
- There is some form of choice in S2 in a majority of schools.
- 277 schools offer from 9 to 20 subjects in S3 (as shown in Table 4) and 81 schools do not publish their S3 curriculum.
- The modal number of subjects taken in S3 is 11 and almost all schools fall within the range comprising 10 - 16 subjects. The commonest pattern is usually configured as 8 "academic" courses (generally modal courses in the sense of Munn modes) plus 3 core subjects (PE, RME, PSE). As seen earlier in this section, a majority of schools appeared to offer ‘8 to
10 subjects plus the PE/RME/PSE core’, where the balance of core and optional subjects fluctuated across schools (and both within and between local authorities).

- 47 schools (13%) indicate that they offer one or more “non-traditional” courses in their S3 curricular structure. The commonest number offered is one, in almost half of all cases, with 2 courses being the next most common. One school provides 5 separate non-traditional courses within its curricular structure; this is obviously one of the schools with an unusually large number of S3 courses. Work-related learning forms by far the most common content for such courses, although problem-solving, critical thinking, Scottish studies and social issues are also evident. A few schools offer such provision in S2 and S1.

- 55 schools do not publish any of their S1-3 curricula and thus cannot be categorized. They are included in the “no information provided” row of Table 4, as are the 52, 54 and 32 schools failing to provide information for S1, S2 and S3 respectively.

- 143/358 schools have changed 1 to 3 years of their S1-3 curricular structures in the year-and-a-quarter since the analysis published in Scott (2017), according to their published statements. The research process partly reported upon in this paper has tracked schools’ published secondary curricula since 2014. From that analysis, it appears that most Scottish secondary schools are now implementing the second, third or fourth iteration of their BGE curriculum. There is, therefore, little evidence to suggest that the S1-3 curriculum is as yet a settled product in Scotland.

Table 4 demonstrates the range of subjects available to S1-3 learners in Scottish secondary schools. Subject choice is a standard feature of all but a very few S3 curricula, most S2 curricula and a minority of S1 curricula.

**Table 4 Range of Subjects in the Secondary Broad General Education Phase of CfE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Subjects Provided in the Curriculum for the Stated Year Group</th>
<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>109</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The number of subjects includes every subject taken by a learner in the S1, S2 or S3 year, including the ‘core’ subjects (usually PE, RE/RMPS and Social/Personal Education).
There are clearly issues of curricular balance, depth and breadth here as some schools offer very narrow curricula from S1 onwards (although some of this is achieved by integrating substantial parts of the curriculum (e.g. the Sciences, Social Subjects, Expressive Arts, Health & Wellbeing and/or Technology) and some crowd their curricula with many subjects, resulting in ‘taster’ courses (long disapproved-of by the Inspectorate for their potential superficiality), rotas of (usually) related subjects or single period exposure to many subjects (again with the danger of superficiality).

In almost all schools, there is little or no evidence of three of the four curricular contexts:
- the ethos and life of the school as a community
- interdisciplinary learning (IDL)
- opportunities for personal achievement.

Inevitably, curriculum areas and subjects predominate in curricular and course choice documentation. The ethos and life of the school is seldom evident in the curricular documentation of schools but, in most schools, can be seen to greater or lesser extents, through webpages, Facebook pages and handbook sections on the wider curriculum or social events and other non-curricular aspects of the school documentation. Opportunities for personal achievement are also seldom seen in the curricular documentation of schools but may also be seen through webpages, Facebook pages and non-curricular sections of handbooks in a small majority of schools. Only a small minority of schools explain or illustrate that they provide any planned and coherent opportunities for interdisciplinary learning (IDL), although that does not mean that IDL is not present in a learner’s experience where the school fails to provide this. There is little help, however, for a parent trying to identify where their child will encounter this aspect of the curriculum.

**Senior Phase**

With respect to subject 'choice columns' within Senior Phase course choice structures:

- 193 schools offer ‘traditional’ S4-5-6 structures (with subject column patterns as follows: 8-5-5, 8-5-4; 7-5-5, 7-5-4, 7-5-3; 6-5-5, 6-5-4, 6-5-3) [with a total of 14 to 18 qualifications available to learners as a result of their S4-6 experience]
- 9 schools offer traditional S4-6 6-5-5 structures with an option for some learners to pursue a 6-6-6 structure [with a total of 16 to 18 qualifications available to learners]
- 22 schools offer a 6-6-6 structure in S4-6 [with a total of 18 qualifications available to learners]
- 7 schools offer some other pattern (e.g. 6-6-4, 6-5-6, 6-5-3, 5-6-6, 5-5-5) [with a total of 14-17 qualifications available to learners]
- 127 schools do not publish all of their S4-6 curricula and thus cannot be categorised.
- There is now almost no evidence of schools opting for 2-year blocks within their S4-6 curriculum, where qualifications are not attempted until the second year of the block.

As S4-6 are the years of qualifications and full course choice, the number of subjects listed for each year does not include the ‘core’ subjects (again, usually PE, RE/RMPS and Social/Personal Education), merely the academic/vocational subjects taken in each of the subject choice columns of the curriculum (with each mostly leading to a qualification) as this is the standard means of describing the Scottish senior curriculum.

To address the question of subject choice within any given curricular structure, a 72-school sample (approximately 1 in 5 of the 358 secondary schools) was selected using a purposive sample (with the intent being to choose schools from each of the 32 local authorities with the number in each authority varying from 1 to 5 to model the relative numbers of schools in each authority). This was not entirely achieved as 7 local authorities had either no or virtually no schools which publish their S3-6 curricula (the main years where choice is available) and so the 72 schools were proportionally balanced across the other 25. The sample was employed because of the time/labour-intensive nature of such analysis.
As with all samples there may be schools which transcend the boundaries identified by this analysis. It is intended to repeat this analysis in a year, analysing all secondary schools. The findings of the sample were:

- The choice of Advanced Highers available to learners ranged from 0 to 19, with the bulk of schools in the range from 5 to 14. Some of the larger groupings included selections from a city campus arrangement where pupils travelled to other nearby schools for certain Advanced Higher subjects.

- The choice of Highers available on-site to S5/6 learners varied from 13 to 31. These were augmented by an off-site choice provided by campus arrangements, smaller partnerships or colleges; this provision varied from 2 to 19. The two provisions were, in general, in inverse proportion so that a school with 30 on-site Highers only added 4 external Highers whereas a small school with 13 on-site Highers offered 13 off-site Highers. Thus, the total range of discrete Higher courses available to learners varied from 14 to 36. In most cases, larger groupings of Highers were more readily available in urban or semi-urban areas with the smallest choice almost always available in rural areas.

- The choice of National 5 courses available to S4-6 learners, including the core subjects of English and Mathematics, varied from 18 to 35. Again, this was augmented by partnership or, less frequently, campus arrangements (which mostly appear to offer Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 and 7 provision) or partnership arrangements. The off-site provision of National 5 courses varied from 0 to 11. Thus, the total number of National 5 courses available to learners varied from 19 to 43.

- The choice of National 4 courses followed similar lines: including the core subjects of English and Mathematics, this varied from 18 to 37. Again, this was augmented by partnership arrangements; the off-site provision of National 4 courses varied from 0 to 10. Thus, the total number of National 4 courses available to learners varied from 19 to 44.

- The situation at National 3 differed significantly. A small majority of schools did not indicate that National 3 courses were provided. Where there were noted, they were often only discernible in English and Mathematics. Numbers of National 3 courses varied from 0 to 7. No partnership provision was evident in the sample schools.

- Some alternative provision (e.g. SQA Skills courses, SQA units, ASDAN courses and some school-based courses were provided. In most cases, these were few in number in relation to the overall curricular offering. Numbers varied from 0 to 11.

- In S3, a majority of schools provided a compulsory core consisting of English, Mathematics, Modern Languages, Physical Education, Religious and Moral Education and Social/Personal Education. A small minority added Science and/or Technology to the core, presumably to support the development of the Science, Technology and Mathematics (STeM) initiative.

- A large minority of the surveyed schools did not include Modern Languages in the S3 Core (although inspection of the complete population suggests this is a slightly smaller minority there). Other evidence collated suggest that this is a smaller, but still significant, minority when the complete population of schools is considered. A smaller minority also did not include Languages in the S2 core and a very small number of schools appeared not to make Modern Languages compulsory in S1. These positions are all in contravention of the 1+2 Languages policy. Almost all S3 curricula provided optional columns for “personalisation” i.e. choice. The number of options varied from 2 to 6 but 5 or 6 were commonest by some distance. A majority of schools appeared to offer ‘8 to 10 subjects plus the PE/RME/PSE core’, where the balance of core and optional subjects fluctuated as described.

The availability of individual subjects is addressed in Section E. It is worth noting, however, that almost all schools offer the “traditional” range of academic subjects (as would have been familiar in a Munn mode context in S4 or a traditional Higher context in S5 or S6. There is significant variation in the number of Advanced Highers on offer.
Section D: What are the factors that influence the range of subject choices? Possible factors include: curriculum timetabling; local decision making; school size; area and school demography.

The first CIE policy paper, *a curriculum for excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004) suggested that:

“The opportunity for children to develop the four capacities will strongly depend upon:

- the environment for learning
- the choice of teaching and learning approaches
- the ways in which learning is organised.”

(Scottish Executive, 2004, p.13)

All of the factors stated in the question are evident, to varying extents, as factors which have influenced schools’ curricula across local authority areas and from school to school within such areas. It is extremely difficult to evince a hierarchy of importance for these factors as they interact. From those schools which publish a curricular rationale, or similar document, their relative influence *appears* to vary quite significantly within and across local authority areas. Analysis of council and school documentation suggests that the differing (and fluctuating) influences include the following groups;

**Geography and Demography**

Significant parts of Scotland do not enjoy the sophisticated transport network to be found in the Central Belt of Scotland, other Scottish urban areas or many parts of the remainder of the UK. Consequently, geography appears to play a significant role, in several ways. There are traditional differences between urban, suburban, semirural and rural areas (with schools in at least two of these areas claiming to be most challenged due to aspects of their setting), but there are also evident differences within the set of schools from a single geographical class. The challenges for remote schools of transport to colleges, partner businesses and events mean that their curriculum may not be enriched to the same extent as that of more urban areas, although a few remote schools appear to have chosen to become schools in a wider world context and to use the internet and international partnerships to enhance their curricular offerings, rather than accept that they are small, remote schools destined not to offer what their more fortunate (in some senses) urban colleagues can. This obviously requires vision, leadership, equipment and finance (all of which may derive from the school, their council, their community or their business partners) in attempting to redress these inequities.

The most obvious demographic differential lies in the fluctuations of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1-10 across the catchment areas served by urban and suburban secondary schools. This causes curricular design issues in meeting the needs of more diverse groups of learners and timetabling/staffing issues as more diverse pupil groups require a wider set of curricular pathways than would be needed in a more homogeneous area. This may also result in consequent flows of learners from one catchment area to another as parents seek “better” learning and attainment for their children than - they perceive - would be available at the local secondary school. This raises an issue highlighted by several headteachers interviewed for a parallel research project within this CIE research suite. As headteachers of schools with “affluent” catchments, their concern lay in providing for the incoming learners from a very different catchment as their local authorities did not class their schools as requiring additional forms of learning support or the staffing set to provide a very different set of courses due to the council’s classification of their school’s SIMD profile. The staffing problem is not simply related to requests for extra staff; if a radical improvement in the range of courses is required to meet an influx of learners with different needs, it may mean that the school requires to remove certain members of staff and bring in other types of teachers for the different courses. In a time of financial restraint, councils cannot necessarily absorb
such changes - certainly not quickly – and this may impact adversely on schools’ budgets and abilities to meet wider needs.

School catchment size and the age (and accommodation/equipment fit) of school buildings can also affect the range of courses and curricular pathways potentially available. It appears from the curricular structures analysed for this paper, however, that very similar schools with similar sizes, pupil bodies and communities, sometimes even in the same town/city, can provide significantly different extents of vocational provision, particularly with respect to college courses and courses provided with business partners. Since local authorities appear, in general, to attempt to mediate college provision to ensure appropriate access to college courses for senior pupils, the available evidence suggests that this variability is related to headteacher/school community preference/vision.

Local decision-making

The extent of local authority direct support for schools also appears to vary. Factors such as promotion of college and business partnerships to support course provision, provision of multi-school campus arrangements to increase the range of courses (and course levels) available to senior pupils, finance, facilities within school buildings and staffing levels and balances all appear to vary, sometimes significantly. Some of this is again clearly related to geography. Some evidence from the analysis of council minutes and reports suggests that this is also due to hard choices made by councils in the face of a very difficult and on-going budgetary situation. Curriculum support officers are far less frequently seen in council staffing lists; attendance officers have disappeared from a range of councils, some with significant aspects of deprivation. This can be a significant blow to equity as attendance is a prerequisite for good learning, low exclusions and high achievement. On the positive side, the appearance of a large set of modern, well-equipped school buildings as the result of joint governmental and council actions has greatly improved the learning environment for many Scottish learners.

Local authority curricular policies and/or guidelines were very hard to find and, apparently, very few in number. Given that it is the duty of the local authority to provide an effective and efficient service and to ensure continuous improvement, it would have seemed likely that a clear curricular policy framework for the major curricular initiative of the era would have been an essential component of their work. Of the 32 local authorities, only 6 displayed a published curriculum policy on their website (or alluded to it in their council reports), although one of these was a pre-CfE policy dating from before 2010. Of the six, two had significant curricular sections within their websites which would support parents in preparing for course choices. Almost all, however, published Standards and Quality reports (and, in a large minority of cases, other reports) which provided some insight into progress with CfE, although none of these analysed subject issues.

In the end, the school curriculum is usually the choice of the school senior management team, in consultation with the school community, although some local authorities have mandated their schools to implement a 6-course curriculum in S4. In a small minority of the schools analysed, there was clear evidence of consultation on the curriculum. In most schools, there was no similar evidence; this does not mean that there has not been consultation on the curriculum, but it is not recorded in parent council minutes or does not form part of the curricular documentation of that school. In some schools, parent council minutes for the years just before and immediately after the launch of CfE and/or the launch of the Senior Phase were not available on the school website and so initial consultations may have happened without evidence remaining in a public place. However, given that the Senior Phase launched three years after the original launch and given that almost all schools have made one or more significant adjustments to their BGE curricula, it is surprising to find so little evidence of consultation on the curriculum or the subjects and experiences available within it.

The end product must be to produce an appropriate CfE curriculum to meet the needs of their learners and community. Given some of the more unusual BGE and Senior Phase structures, it seems fair to raise the question of whether the background, experience, training and
capabilities of all school senior management teams are of a suitably high standard. Inspectorate statements on leadership (including leadership of improvement and curricular leadership) have suggested that, although many are of a high or very high standard, not all fit into these categories. This therefore raises a further question of the extent to which school curricular provision in mediated – either nationally or by councils – beyond the major inspection which occurs every 15 years or so. Most councils have a “supported self-evaluation” process in place. Despite this, there are a few quite extreme curricula, school websites do not exist in some places and published handbooks (some on council websites) may be years out of date. The evident question is that of whether, in an age of fiscal pressure and radically reduced central education staffing, local authorities have the capacity to ensure that their schools are fully meeting the necessary standards.

To balance the previous issue, there appear to be interesting correlations between the efforts of some schools in areas of high deprivation to be provide meaningful and interesting curricular opportunities to attract their learners to attend, as well as the previously-mentioned efforts of some remote and semi-rural schools to widen and deepen their curricula and increased achievement in some/most of these schools. It appears that vision, knowledge, widely based leadership, empathy for the learner body and appropriate professional skills are the fundamental requirements for a successful curriculum that will support “better” learning and “better” achievement.

**Timetabling and Staffing**

Timetabling and staffing should not be permitted to be constraints. The first of these must be a servant to the needs of the curriculum, not its master. The stereotype of the huddled timetabler, instructing the senior management team on “what works” in the curriculum is long-gone in most Scottish schools. Many secondary schools now have a timetabling team to spread expertise, protect against illness at crucial times and provide debate and reflection on how curricular priorities can be achieved. Given the high-quality annual timetabling courses provided by at least one university and several councils, timetabling skill should not be an issue. The only professional issue is that of whether the timetabler(s) understands the priorities and challenges of CfE to the necessary extent.

The main issues in timetabling lie with staffing issues, particularly with respect to what can be done with unneeded teachers or how to cope with the lack of necessary teachers, although campus arrangements, school-to-school partnerships, business partner provision and college/university partnerships all provide extra resources and opportunities for the curricular planner and timetable alike. As seen before, however, some schools have greater access to these than others.

**Section E: Have you experienced any changes in the level of uptake in particular subjects in the past 5 years? If so, what subjects in particular and what do you think has caused this change?**

The Scottish S4-6 CfE curriculum may appear fairly ‘traditional’ to users such as parents or employers as, in almost all schools, pupils still pursue sets of qualifications in S4, S5 and S6, as per the experience of earlier generations of learners. A closer inspection, however, reveals that across Scotland there is a highly significant disparity of experience for learners. The Depute First Minister has indicated that this is because:

“schools now have the freedom and flexibility to design a bespoke three-year senior phase of a range of courses and qualifications tailored to meet the needs of the young people at the school (Swinney, 2018, p.2).”

This is undoubtedly true but it was also true a decade before the Senior Phase. Circular 3/2001 *Guidance on Flexibility in the Curriculum* (Scottish Executive, 2013) granted headteachers significant flexibility in the design, organization and delivery of the curriculum, subject to certain criteria:
• there should be clearly identified educational gain for pupils based on a clear rationale and objectives and consistent with the [then] National Priorities;
• there should be full consultation with stakeholders (including parents, teachers and pupils) and consensus before proposals are introduced; and
• rigorous quality assurance arrangements should be in place to monitor and evaluate the proposals and their implementation against the objectives and the results of these evaluations should be made available to the key stakeholders; and
• there should be well planned implementation using development plans and action plans.

That these criteria were still being quoted to headteachers and their colleagues during the build-up to, and implementation of, CfE is evidenced by their place in two HMI national presentations of 2010 and 2011 accessed as part of the evidence for this paper. It would be difficult to disagree with the criteria, with the exception of the now-obsolete National Priorities, as all four criteria were wholly or partially incorporated into advice to schools on the implementation of CfE. However, Scott (2017), Scott (2018) and Section C of this paper identify significant disparities in the construction of the S1-3 and S4 curricula across Scottish schools and Section A of this paper summarises aspects of the findings of Scott (2019a, in press) which identify further significant disparities aspects of the findings of Scott (2019a, in press) which identify further significant disparities in the S5-6 curriculum.

The findings presented in the Senior Phase part of Section C suggests that senior phase courses are more traditional than the Depute First Minister’s statement would suggest. The analysis carried out also suggests that the four criteria of Circular 3/2001 may not have been met in all schools. There are, however, some encouraging signs with respect to the extent to which a majority of school senior curricula now provide courses for less able, average or more vocationally inclined learners in a more coherent manner than before CfE.

The issue with curricular design does not appear to be that of “tailoring to meet the needs of young people” but rather that some local authorities (and some schools) have adopted positions with respect to their S4 curricular structures - ranging from a formal council requirement to follow one model (usually 6 subjects in S4) through to allowing each school to select 5 to 8 courses to suit their ‘local needs’. There is significantly greater variation in secondary curricular structures and examination presentation patterns in the CfE era than was previously the case with O Grades, Standard Grades and the Munn curriculum (SED, 1982) and/or the subsequent Higher Still programme. Analysis of each school’s curricular structure and their curricular rationale (where such exists), however, does not support the concept that the more extreme or greatly narrowed curricular models provide a better fit for many or most of their pupils.

The end result of the taking up of curricular positions – not based on theory, as Priestley and Humes (2010) have noted and not based on the four criteria listed at the start of this section - is that some individual subjects and a few whole subject areas have been greatly reduced in numbers of enrolments, particularly amongst the least able and particularly in S4 but with a range of consequent effects in S5 and S6. Since 2013, some subject enrolments have fluctuated to a highly significant extent, some have dropped significantly and some have grown. Obviously, the outcomes of the S4 uptake have an impact on uptake and attainment in S5 and S6, although SCQF 7 results have been almost impervious to lower curriculum changes, as the most able appear to succeed (almost) regardless of the curriculum provided.

As Terry Lanagan, former Director of Education in West Dunbartonshire told the Education and Skills Committee on 18 January 2017, “we cannot look at S4 in isolation – we have to consider the whole senior phase.” This is self-evident but what Mr Lanagan omitted to add was that, if something goes badly wrong in S4, particularly if this happens amongst the most able who provide the “gold standard” Higher candidates of the future, then the effects of this will become evident in reduced uptake and attainment in the subsequent years – hence the interest of several researchers in S4 curriculum, uptake and attainment, as uptake and
attainment trends are more readily evident in S4 than in the subsequent years where CfE is still relatively new.

The Depute First Minister recently noted that: “any comparisons of the Senior Phase must take into account the fundamental differences between curriculum design before and after the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence” (Swinney, 2018, p.1). Insofar as this statement goes, it is accurate. The most obvious difference to an observer is that most Scottish schools have moved from 8 qualifications in S4 to 6 or 7. Although the proportions fluctuate from year to year, the basic position for the last two years appears to be that around one-half of schools offer 6 S4 courses, one-third offer 7 courses and one-sixth 8 courses (with a handful offering 5) A very few schools moved to 5 or 9, although almost all of these have now reverted to 6, 7 or 8. The equation for the average number of courses offered is therefore:

\[
0.5 \times 6 + 0.33 \times 7 + 0.16 \times 8 = 6.64
\]

6.64 is 83% of the “traditional” 8 courses; thus, the reduction from 2013 to 2018 in the average number of qualifications offered is 17%. In actual fact, it is currently 16.7% (but note the modifying comments above) as the “half-third-sixth” picture is merely an easily understood approximation to the actual figures. Thus, in considering what has happened to subjects in S4 under CfE, the observer should expect an average decline of 16.7% in enrolments from the 2013 position to the 2018 position.

One must be careful in accepting this, however, as pre-CfE S4 pupils did not all do 8 courses: some schools offered only 7 and many less able pupils in many schools were permitted to take 7, 6, 5 or, in a few cases, fewer subjects. This reduces the extent of the decline in S4 uptake caused by the “fundamental differences between curriculum design before and after CfE” from the 16.7% noted in this section to around 14-15%. The actual decline in course uptake from 2013 to 2018 is 25.5%, almost twice the CfE structural decline.

The uptake figures for national 3-5 courses are shown in Table 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>SCQF 3-5</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
<th>Change from 2013 to 2018</th>
<th>% Change from 2013 to 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting/A.&amp; Fin.</td>
<td>1,664</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>-768</td>
<td>-46.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>10,674</td>
<td>10,075</td>
<td>8,815</td>
<td>8,416</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td>7,184</td>
<td>-2,490</td>
<td>-23.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>22,535</td>
<td>19,301</td>
<td>15,988</td>
<td>14,833</td>
<td>13,969</td>
<td>13,165</td>
<td>-9,370</td>
<td>-41.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>37,212</td>
<td>35,254</td>
<td>32,745</td>
<td>30,970</td>
<td>30,627</td>
<td>28,773</td>
<td>-8,439</td>
<td>-27.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business / B.Man.</td>
<td>11,611</td>
<td>11,708</td>
<td>10,961</td>
<td>10,483</td>
<td>10,670</td>
<td>10,215</td>
<td>-1,396</td>
<td>-12.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>-193</td>
<td>-17.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>28,247</td>
<td>26,709</td>
<td>24,322</td>
<td>23,099</td>
<td>21,937</td>
<td>20,485</td>
<td>-7,762</td>
<td>-27.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Languages</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td>+6.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Studies</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>-197</td>
<td>-59.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing Studies</td>
<td>15,985</td>
<td>13,088</td>
<td>11,790</td>
<td>11,153</td>
<td>10,418</td>
<td>9,622</td>
<td>-6,363</td>
<td>-39.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Craft &amp; Des./Tech.</td>
<td>10,283</td>
<td>6,753</td>
<td>7,158</td>
<td>6,756</td>
<td>6,453</td>
<td>6,257</td>
<td>-4,026</td>
<td>-39.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; Mnt.</td>
<td>28,247</td>
<td>26,709</td>
<td>24,322</td>
<td>23,099</td>
<td>21,937</td>
<td>20,485</td>
<td>-7,762</td>
<td>-27.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>H only</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>8,400</td>
<td>6,715</td>
<td>6,247</td>
<td>5,794</td>
<td>5,585</td>
<td>5,609</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>-85</td>
<td>-23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer’g Craft</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1,693</td>
<td>2,234</td>
<td>2,228</td>
<td>2,155</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>+217</td>
<td>+11.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sk./Eng. Science</td>
<td>79,947</td>
<td>76,685</td>
<td>71,046</td>
<td>65,755</td>
<td>63,863</td>
<td>60,899</td>
<td>-19,048</td>
<td>-23.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>1,076</td>
<td>1,273</td>
<td>1,587</td>
<td>1,781</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>+977</td>
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<td>491</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>489,202</td>
<td>-12.2%</td>
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Notes:

1. Minority subjects with very small groupings or which are almost entirely taught outwith schools are omitted. A range of subjects which ceased in 2012-13, just before the time of introduction of the Senior Phase, are omitted unless they continued largely unchanged under a new title; where this happened, the uptake for the old and new courses are amalgamated in the years where they overlapped.
2. The “Total” row includes the total for all subjects, including, in 2012-13, those not later continued into the CIE era (and thus omitted from this list) and, for all sessions, some minor subjects which are usually taught in colleges rather than in secondary schools.
3. Subjects in the 2012-13 column with 0 enrolments are subjects which began in 2013-14 with the onset of CIE.
4. The pale green and pink colours denote a significant increase or decrease in the number of enrolees from year to year.

In S4, the overall uptake by subject has changed significantly. The average 16.7% decline (or 14-15%) is mirrored by only a limited number of subjects. A number of key points may be seen:

- The three core subjects (blue) – English, Gaidhlig and Mathematics have fared quite differently, with Gaidhlig following the average decline, Mathematics doing better than the
average decline and English doing significantly worse. The reasons for this are not clear from the data collected.

- 15 subjects (bright green) have performed better than the expected 15-17% decline. Caution should, however, be exercised with Business, Home Economics and technology subjects as most of these gains are due to the radical restructuring of these subject areas at the beginning of CfE (with both “winners” and “losers” apparent).

- 11 subjects (yellow) have fared significantly worse than the average 15 to 17% decline expected because of the “fundamental differences between the Senior Phase curriculum now and under the previous system. Their decline has been between 39% and 61%. Again, caution should also be exercised with Business, Home Economics and Technology subjects as most of these losses reflect the other half of the picture of restructuring of these subject areas at the beginning of CfE.

The principal “winners” in this evolving situation are Cake Production and some other parts of Home Economics, although some parts of Technology have also fared well. In all of these cases, these aspects of the subject appear to have prospered at the expense of other parts of the subject area concerned. However, both RMPS and ESOL have also grown significantly.

Of the declines shown, the Modern Languages decline in French, Gaelic (Learners) and to a lesser extent, German are of highly significant concern, given the importance of this subject area, not least in a post-Brexit era where Scotland and the UK will need to “speak for themselves” to foreign countries. The small Language subjects have held on to their limited clienteles and Spanish is again growing after a 21% drop at the time of CfE implementation.

Expressive Arts, particularly Art, Drama and Music, have not fared well. Computing Studies, once an apparently highly important growth area is also in sharp decline. However, the 22-27% declines evident in the three main Science subjects are significant in a country for which SteM subjects (Science, Technology and Mathematics) are an important part of the future economic, scientific and academic wellbeing of the country. Almost certainly, this is because parents do not find it as easy to ensure that their children can take three subjects in a narrow 6-subject curriculum (where 2 subjects are already committed to English and Mathematics). Although Mr Lanagan suggested that schools, “can continue to have the breadth of choice and the specialism of three sciences even if they opt to have six subjects at S4” (Swinney, 2018, p.2), this does not seem to be the case.

The uptake figures for Higher (SCQF 6) subjects are shown in Table 6:

### Table 6 Overall National 6 Learner Enrolment by Subject

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<td>1,364</td>
<td>1,319</td>
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<td>-1%</td>
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<td>2,686</td>
<td>3,510</td>
<td>3,963</td>
<td>4,099</td>
<td>4,051</td>
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<td>6,234</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>5,369</td>
<td>5,299</td>
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<td>-17%</td>
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<td>10,328</td>
<td>9,903</td>
<td>7,492</td>
<td>7,575</td>
<td>7,306</td>
<td>-3,022</td>
<td>-29%</td>
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<td>8,454</td>
<td>9,108</td>
<td>9,116</td>
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<td>1,137</td>
<td>1,130</td>
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<td>9,992</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>111</td>
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<td>152</td>
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<td>409</td>
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<td>440</td>
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<td>427</td>
<td>461</td>
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### Agenda item 1

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<td>87</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>103</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>182,730</td>
<td>191,859</td>
<td>199,869</td>
<td>197,750</td>
<td>194,804</td>
<td>191,952</td>
<td>+93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

1. A range of subjects which ceased in 2013-14, just before the time of introduction of the Senior Phase Higher courses, are omitted unless they continued largely unchanged under a new title; where this happened, the uptake for the old and new courses are amalgamated in the years where they overlapped.
2. The "Total" row includes the total for all subjects, including, in 2012-13 and 2013-14, those not later continued into the CfE era (and thus omitted from this list) and, in 2014-15, the "old" and "new" Higher totals have been combined.
3. Subjects in the 2012-13 column with 0 enrolments are subjects which began in 2014-15 with the onset of CfE Highers.
4. The pale green and pink colours denote a significant increase or decrease in the number of enrollees from year to year.
Table 6 should be considered in conjunction with the Senior Phase findings of Section C on the construction of schools’ senior course choice sheets.

As with the SCQF 3-5 curriculum of S4, there are “winners” and “losers” in the post-CfE SCQF 6 curriculum. Within the CfE period, 14 subjects have grown significantly — either as large raw-number rises or as large percentage rises. Of these, the most significant are the highly significant English figure (+4,592 course enrolments per annum) and the significant P.E. figure (+2,704 enrolments p.a.). The growth in Spanish (and, on a much smaller scale, Chinese, Italian and Latin) is also significant as it has been achieved against a more difficult pattern for other foreign languages. The Human Biology gain partially balances the significant loss in Biology. The other notable growth patterns are echoes of the adjustments in Business, Technology, etc. seen in S4.

11 subjects have declined significantly — either as large raw-number declines or as large percentage declines. Of these, the most significant are the declines of 3,022 Biology course enrolments per annum, 2,352 Mathematics course enrolments and the decline of almost 2,000 Physics enrolments. Together with a decline of over a thousand in Chemistry, this again represents a significant negative impact on the key STeM area. Other areas of growth are again adjustments of the balance of subjects in some multi-subject curricular areas such as Business or Expressive Arts.

In terms of the overall set of enrolments, there is little variation between 2014 and 2018. For a sustained period from the early 2000s to 2015, Higher enrolments had grown reasonably steadily, despite — or perhaps because of — the lack of any new curricular initiative affecting Higher during this period and despite a slowly declining pupil population. Since 2015-16, Higher enrolments have started to decline (despite a similar rate of pupil decline).

As noted elsewhere, SCQF Level 7 course choices, enrolments and attainment appear to be relatively little affected by CfE. Section C noted that there is significant variation in the availability of SCQF 7 courses. This appears to be jointly due to school size and geography. If small schools are in urban areas, however, they have a significantly better chance of improving the range of SCQF 7 courses available to learners through campus mechanisms or school-to-school partnerships.
Section F: What is the impact, positive or negative, of any limitations on subject choices?

The impact of curricular narrowing in S4 has been described in Scott (2017), Scott (2018) and earlier in this paper. 187/358 schools (down from 195 at the last survey) describe themselves as offering only 6 qualifications in S4. Their ‘standard offer’ of courses to their students is to provide English, Mathematics and any other four subjects. These schools must attempt to accommodate experiences in Expressive Arts, Languages, Business, Health & Wellbeing, ICT, Science, Social Subjects and Technology within those four columns. Inevitably, for each child, significant aspects of their prior curricular experience cease after S3.

Many parents and learners, whether based on parental experience or a view of the learner's future vocation, appear to have opted for either “two Sciences and a Social Subject” or “two Socials and a Science”. This undoubtedly reflects a societal (and school?) perception of the hierarchy of importance of subjects but does not fit well with the relative breadth of curriculum experienced traditionally in Scottish education. Those learners who wish to take three Sciences MAY be able to achieve this (see Section E) but they are then left with one curricular choice to cover Expressive Arts, Languages, Business, Health & Wellbeing, ICT, Social Subjects and Technology. This does not constitute a broad Scottish experience; it as far more akin to the narrower specialisation seen in the English curriculum. Curricular narrowing also means that most 6-course schools stack more subjects into each column, therefore potentially limiting the number of repetitions of certain high-demand subjects across columns and making the achievement of certain subject combinations more difficult. This can act to reduce the number of curricular pathways available to learners.

In terms of outcomes, the problem is not with the total number of qualifications achieved over the Senior Phase – to some extent this is a sterile area of argument as there is relatively little difference in gaining 17 qualifications or 18 (and this will not deter an employer or university if the grades are appropriate). The problem lies with what actually happens when a child pursues a 6-course S4 curriculum. Initial research carried out in several local authorities for forthcoming papers suggests that the average number of qualifications attempted by learners in 6-course environments is around 5 (plus or minus a small increment). Therefore, if anything goes wrong, the learner can be below or well below having the desired set of 5/6 courses to carry forward at appropriate levels and this issue affects the average and the able as well as the least able. This was also a factor in 8-course curricula but these tended to default to 5–7 courses on average, leaving most children with 5 desirable qualifications (hence the national figure for 5 or more courses at Level 3 being in the high nineties) with which to proceed to the next year. This is not so with 6-course curricula.

One worrying feature of the CfE era is that the government, local authorities and schools appear to have agreed to cease reporting how many pupils have achieved 5 courses at given levels and at each stage of their studies. Given that these figures are readily available from the Insight database, there has to be another reason for this. The “6 courses becomes about 5 on average” situation described in the previous paragraph may be the reason that (most) schools and authorities have been pleased to give up such reports. Again, initial research in a sample of authorities suggests that, while some schools have had good or very good results, particularly with the most able CfE S4 learners, other schools have had significantly poorer results under CfE, particularly with the least able - with some schools losing a third to a half of their “5 or more at Level 3 in S4” figures. The Scottish government and local authorities could greatly assist research and analysis of what needs to be done to improve CfE by publishing these figures.

The figures published in sections A-E of this paper suggest that a few secondary schools are engendering much narrower curricular choice for their learners from S1 onwards. The figures also suggest that a few schools are inhibiting depth of learning in the BGE phase by exposing learners to large numbers of subjects through “taster” courses and rota arrangements. The
broad middle group of schools has held to something resembling a traditional S1-2 experience but with significant variations in S3 and S4.

Some individual subjects have been experienced highly significantly reduced uptake, particularly in S4, but in the case of Modern Languages, Expressive Arts and the SteM subjects, this is evident in S5 and S6 as well. This has the potential to engender a significant impairment of the academic, scientific and business-related capacity of Scotland through the decline in Modern Languages and SteM subjects and of the cultural life of Scotland through the declines in Expressive Arts. Computing is also affected at S4 but this does not appear to have so far impacted heavily at Higher or Advanced Higher. There is, however, a question with respect to the ICT skills of the wider body of learners.

Concluding Thoughts

As the findings of this paper (Sections A-F) suggest, there is evidence from analysis of secondary curricula and course choice documentation of significant variability (although not necessarily flexibility) of curricular design across schools, although a consistency across this very broad range of curricula in meeting the needs of individual children or responding to local needs is not substantiated either by this paper or by the data in the previous papers. There is also a limited amount of evidence of creative teaching and learning evident in local authority and school publications, although this does not mean that such positive aspects are absent. The evidence may be limited because of a traditional Scottish reticence to make claims of success but also because interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of the school and its community and (particularly sadly) opportunities for a wider range of personal achievement are largely missing from the curricular and course choice publications of most Scottish secondary schools. Analysis of all state secondary school handbooks and, where available, course choice material, website documents and attainment data suggests, however, that there is much less evidence of teaching across and beyond traditional subject boundaries.

Likewise, although there is some evidence of higher standards of achievement for some learners in some schools, the evidence gathered across all schools does not suggest that the curriculum as delivered is producing such an effect for the majority of learners. A previous paper by the author (Scott, 2018) suggested that progression from one curricular level to the next in the Scottish S1-4 curriculum was variable, that the BGE curriculum had become fragmented and that choice had been narrowed for many learners. This is further substantiated by the evidence set out in Sections A-F below and in two forthcoming papers (Scott, 2019a, in press; Scott, 2019b, in press) on the Scottish S1-6 curriculum.

The future of some subjects, particularly a range of Modern Languages, must be in significant doubt in the medium term, if trends continue. The SteM subjects are not in this position but the slower decline here is continuing and may impair Scotland’s economy in the longer term. There is also some evidence in the tables and lists of this paper of some transference of learners from ‘harder’ academic subjects not only to vocational choices but also to ‘softer’ subjects such as RME, PE and Cake Production. If this trend continues, it may better meet learners’ interests but it will not necessarily be a good fit for the business and economic needs of a future Scotland. It seems, therefore, that there is a need for further analysis of these apparent trends and for societal positions to be considered regarding the importance of Expressive Arts, Languages, ICT and SteM subjects. If they are as important as they have been claimed to be in the past, there will be a need for governmental, local authority and school action to engage and support parents and learners in opting for these subject areas. After 5 years of CfE data, the analysis contained in this paper and others of this series reflect the fact that not all aspects of CfE are working as they had been envisaged.

There is also some limited evidence within this paper to suggest that equity may, at least in some contexts, have worsened rather than improved, as a result of how some/many authorities and schools have implemented CfE. If so, this is obviously a significant challenge to the government’s equity strategy. Numbers of pupils leaving with no SQA qualifications...
appear to be rising across many local authorities. Attainment at level 3 has worsened significantly. Attainment at Level 4 has also worsened, although to a lesser extent than at level 3. Results are better at levels 5-7 but there are evident issues in these domains.

There needs to be a degree of honesty and cooperation in all parts of Scotland’s politico-educational governance system if these issues are to be addressed effectively. All schools need to publish coherent curricular and attainment information to support ALL parents (as opposed to merely supporting the current year group involved in a particular choice process) in playing their part in the education of their children. All local authorities need to publish their curricular policies and guidelines, as well as overarching attainment data, in forms understandable by all parents and employers. The benefits for learners of pursuing certain currently declining subjects also need to be spelled out and linked to job/academic opportunities for those learners. A few local authorities provide quite effective information on their websites but others have recently withdrawn from such practices (as broken links in schools’ website and handbook sections on attainment and curriculum demonstrate most eloquently).

The Scottish Government’s insistence on publishing headline 1+ @ Level 5 and 1+ @ level 6 figures for leaver attainment and focusing narrowly on Literacy, Numeracy and “tariff points” (to the bemusement of most parents and some teachers) appears contrived (not least since the 2@, 3@, 4@ and 5@ leaver data is tucked away in an annual publication if one knows where to seek it – but how many parents do?).

It appears, on the evidence of this paper and related publications, that only by allowing light into the continuing (after 16 years!) issues within CfE development can Scotland achieve the benefits that have always been potentially available from the introduction of this potentially significant educational initiative.
References


Scott (2017) Curriculum for Excellence and the Early / Middle Secondary Curriculum in Scotland: Lessons Learned or Forgotten? Available at:


Scott, J. (2019b, in press) *Curriculum for Excellence and Attainment: Reinforcing Success for the Able and Failure for the Less Able?* [To be available in early/mid 2019].


Royal Society of Edinburgh

Summary

- There is growing concern about narrowing of curricula across the UK, particularly in the context of international comparisons and the way in which the nature of work is changing. There has undoubtedly been a narrowing of the curriculum across Scottish secondary schools with fewer subjects being taken in S4 compared to previously. Six qualification courses at S4 is the most common approach.

- The impact of reduced subject choice will be felt most keenly by those learners who leave school at S4 with fewer qualifications than previously might have been the case. This conflicts with the Scottish Government’s aspiration to close the attainment gap. Recent research has, worryingly, found a clear relationship between the reduction in the number of subject choices made by S4 pupils and the level of deprivation of the school’s catchment area, with the reduction in subject choice being most pronounced in schools in areas of higher deprivation.

- Reduced course choice at S4 can constrain learners’ S5/6 options since it will be more difficult to progress to Higher level in S5 or S6 without the pre-requisite learning at National 5 level. Fewer course options at S4 also reduces the learner’s room for manoeuvre in the event that s/he does not succeed in one or more of their chosen subjects. This is not only important for those learners who plan to leave at the end of their compulsory schooling, but also for those who intend to progress to further study in their chosen subjects at S5/6.

- CfE is intended to be an integrated, 3-18 curriculum. It is important to consider the extent to which the broad general education and senior phases operate together to form a coherent curriculum. There has been no independent review of the coherence of the entire school learning journey and work undertaken to date indicates a lack of clear curricular rationale for the different curriculum structures adopted by schools. The relationship between the broad general education and senior phases has a significant bearing on the extent to which learners are prepared for qualification courses and on schools’ senior phase structures.

- The RSE is firmly of the view that independent research needs to be undertaken to assess the impact of different curriculum structures and qualification patterns on attainment. This should not only look at school-based attainment but needs to consider the implications for post-school destinations, including further and higher education and employment.

Background

1. The RSE Education Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee’s inquiry into subject choices. This is an area of longstanding interest and importance, and one that continues to receive significant attention as more information and data become available about
the curriculum structures and learner pathways that are taking hold under Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The RSE response draws on the research work undertaken so far and we highlight areas in which further research is required. The RSE would be pleased to discuss our comments with the Committee should members consider this helpful.

**Has the structure of the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence allowed for better learning and overall achievement than previously?**

2. It is difficult to answer this question objectively in the absence of independent evaluation of the impact of the senior phase on learning and achievement. The OECD’s review of CfE primarily covered only the Broad General Education (BGE) period to the end of S3; it did not extend to the senior phase.\(^1\) There has, therefore, not been an independent review of the coherence of the entire school learner journey. There is a tendency to look at the BGE and the senior phase of school in isolation from one another. Since CfE is supposed to be an integrated, 3-18 curriculum, it is important to look at how, taken together, the BGE and senior phase operate as a coherent whole.

3. It is notable that there is a lack of accessible information on schools’ curricular models, including those relating to the senior phase. Work has, however, been undertaken to try to generate a better understanding of schools’ curriculum structures. The study published last year by Professor Jim Scott provides detailed insight into the multitude of ways in which schools are structuring the first four years of the secondary curriculum.\(^2\) In doing so, the study highlights the high level of fragmentation in terms of many secondary schools’ approaches to the BGE and a lack of clear curricular rationale for the different structures adopted. This is due, in large part, to very little attention having been given to curriculum design during the development and implementation of CfE. This emphasises the importance of ensuring the use of appropriate curriculum theory in the design of curricula. With the delivery of CfE varying by school, it is important that the character of the variation inherent in schools’ approaches to CfE is understood well. The RSE strongly believes that independent research needs to be undertaken to assess the impact of different curriculum structures and qualification patterns on attainment. This is in line with the OECD’s view that there is a need to evaluate how CfE is actually being implemented in schools, especially in relation to learning outcomes and pupil progress.

4. It will not only be important to consider the impact of the senior phase structures on learners’ school-based achievements; this has to be linked to post-school

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\(^1\) Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective; 2015  

\(^2\) Scott, J.; Curriculum for Excellence and the Early/Middle Secondary Curriculum in Scotland: Lessons Learned or Forgotten?; March 2018  
transitions and destinations, including the implications for entry to and achievement at further and higher education, and into employment.

Do you think there has been a narrowing of the range of subjects and subject choices in broad general education and in the senior phase, and what is the impact of any limitations on subject choice?

Narrowing of subject choice at S4

5. There has undoubtedly been a narrowing of the curriculum across Scottish secondary schools with fewer subjects being taken in S4 compared to the breadth of choice available under the pre-CfE Standard Grades.\(^3\) Recent research indicates that the majority of Scottish secondary schools now offer six qualification courses at S4.\(^4\) The widespread reduction in the number of subjects studied in S4 is not the result of any conscious policy decision but is the unintended consequence of the interpretation of national guidance, with the SQA national qualification courses based on 160 hours of directed study.

BGE and senior phase relationship

6. The ongoing confusion in this area led to Education Scotland issuing updated guidance to schools in 2016.\(^5\) This sought to clarify the relationship between the BGE and the senior phase, particularly as to how the former can be used to prepare learners for the latter. The guidance also stated that schools should offer between six and eight qualification courses from S4. This has helped to minimise the number of schools offering fewer than six courses at S4\(^6\). However, its effectiveness in enabling a broader senior phase hinges on the extent to which schools use S3 to prepare learners for qualifications but in a way that does not compromise their entitlement to a broad general education in S3. This is the nub of the issue since the synergy between the BGE and the senior phase will have a significant bearing on the extent to which learners are prepared for qualification courses and the shape of the senior phase curriculum structures.

7. In addition, it would be instructive to consider the extent to which the CfE Benchmarks, introduced in 2017 to help de-code the CfE Experiences and Outcomes, have improved the tracking and monitoring of learners’ progress in the BGE and aided progression to the senior phase.

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\(^3\) Priestley, M. and Shapira, M.; Narrowing the Curriculum? Contemporary trends in provision and attainment in the Scottish Curriculum; Paper presented at the European Conference for Educational Research, Copenhagen, 21-25 August 2017 [https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/25879#.XHQq7iqqUI](https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/handle/1893/25879#.XHQq7iqqUI)

\(^4\) Scott, J.; Curriculum for Excellence and the Early/Middle Secondary Curriculum in Scotland: Lessons Learned or Forgotten?; March 2018


\(^6\) Professor Jim Scott’s research published in March 2018 found only four schools offering five qualification courses at S4 down from an original 18 or 19 schools.

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Senior phase curriculum models

8. The curriculum model for many schools results in candidates being taught qualification courses within a single academic year. The number of qualification courses that can be taken in S4 will be influenced by the preparation learners have received in BGE, the SCQF level of the qualification itself and the amount of time available for teaching and learning for the qualifications within the scope of one academic session.

9. Other approaches to curriculum models in S4 include young people ‘by-passing’ National 5 and moving straight to Higher or, indeed, taking National 5 courses over two years. While these models can provide more time for learning and teaching, they too have an impact on subject choice in the senior phase. Candidates would need to choose the courses that they would be aiming to achieve in S5 by the end of S3, a full year earlier than in the previous system. In the case of those learners taking National 5 courses over two years, while they would likely have a broader range of subjects from which to select their Highers, they would need to undertake them in S6, a year later than in the previous system.

10. In addition, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) has opened up learning and career pathways in the senior phase, making it possible for more vocational courses, including modern apprenticeships, to be provided at this level and increasing connections between schools, other education partners and employers. It would be useful to consider to what extent schools are providing for these opportunities.

11. The above points emphasise the need to generate a better understanding of schools’ senior phase curriculum structures and their impact on attainment. This closely links to the need to give much more attention to the importance of curriculum design.

Implications of narrowing of subject choice, including on the attainment gap and on meeting the needs of individual learners

12. While we agree that it is important to look at the totality of learners’ attainment at the end of the S4-S6 senior phase, the impact of reduced choice will be felt most keenly by those learners who leave school at S4 with fewer qualifications than previously might have been the case. This conflicts with the Scottish Government’s aspiration to close the attainment gap. Reduced course choice at S4 can also constrain learners’ S5 and S6 options since it will be more difficult for a learner to progress to Higher level in S5 or 6 if they have not had the pre-requisite learning at National 5 level. Fewer course options at S4 also reduces the learner’s room for manoeuvre in the event that s/he does not succeed in one or more of their chosen subjects. This is not only important for those learners who plan to leave at the end of their compulsory schooling, but also for those who intend to progress to further study in their chosen subjects at S5/6. These points also highlight the pressure placed on learners relatively early in their school careers.
(i.e. by the end of S3) to make their senior phase course options, with narrowing of subjects making it more difficult for learners to deviate from their initial choices.

13. It will be very important to consider the impact of narrowing course choice at S4 on the effort to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Recent research from the University of Stirling has, worryingly, found a clear relationship between the reduction in the number of subject choices made by S4 pupils and the level of deprivation in the school’s catchment area, with the reduction in subject choice being most pronounced in schools in areas of higher deprivation. This therefore adds another dimension in terms of subject choice and its links to economic disadvantage.

14. The Committee could consider the extent to which local authorities have imposed on schools under their responsibility a blanket approach to senior phase curriculum structures, particularly on the number of courses that can be studied at S4. While a uniform approach may provide consistency among schools within a local authority, it may not be in the best interests or meet the needs of individual learners within secondary schools. In any event, this approach is difficult to reconcile with the joint agreement between Scottish Government and local authorities that schools should be increasingly empowered in relation to decisions about the curriculum.

15. There is also an important issue in relation to the extent to which schools are able to accommodate and offer a range of differentiated curriculum pathways to meet individual learners’ needs as opposed to applying a ‘one-size fits all’ curriculum structure. Given that personalisation and choice is a key principle of CfE, it will be important to ensure the availability of differentiated curriculum pathways. Our comments on DYW opportunities are relevant here.

**What factors influence the range of subject choices?**

16. A variety of factors can influence the range of subject choices available. This includes: learners’ individual needs; the availability (or lack thereof) of subject specialist teachers; local authority and school decision making, including the level of school autonomy; timetabling; school demographics; school location and size; and school partnerships, including clusters and linkages to other education establishments.

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**Footnote:**

7 Dr Marina Shapira oral evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee, 19 September 2018.

Connected developments

**Interdisciplinary Learning**

17. While our earlier comments focus on subject choice, it is very important that learners are able to make connections between and across different disciplines since life, especially the world of work, requires people who are able to solve problems that draw upon knowledge from more than one discipline. Having secured its place as an explicit context for learning, interdisciplinary learning (IDL) is one of the most innovative features of CfE. However, progress in implementing IDL in Scottish schools has been slow and patchy. There remains a lack of clarity and understanding among many headteachers and teachers about what constitutes IDL, how it relates to the disciplines across the curriculum, how it should be assessed and why it is important for learners. The ongoing focus on reform of the qualifications along with the practical challenges to schools of providing the collaborative conditions to support IDL remain barriers to its implementation.

18. Over several years the RSE has undertaken a range of work with partners to increase the awareness and understanding of IDL in Scottish education. On 30th January, we hosted a major one-day conference which considered IDL within and across the school, further and higher education sectors and employment. This brought together a wide range of perspectives from Scotland, the UK and also internationally. The RSE is undertaking further work to ensure that the conference outputs and outcomes contribute to helping to embed IDL in Scottish education. We would be pleased to keep the Committee updated on these developments.

**Other UK developments**

19. There is growing concern about narrowing of curricula across the UK, particularly in the context of international comparisons and in the way in which the nature of work is changing. The Royal Society, London, has, for example, recently set out plans for a review of UK post-16 education and the RSE is considering how we can contribute to the Scottish dimension of their work.\(^8\)

**Additional Information**

This Advice Paper has been signed off by the RSE General Secretary. Any enquiries about this Advice Paper should be addressed to Mr William Hardie

Responses are published on the RSE website ([www.rse.org.uk](http://www.rse.org.uk))

The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland's National Academy, is Scottish Charity No. SC000470

\(^8\) [https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/Publications/2019/12-02-19-jobs-are-changing-so-should-education.pdf](https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/Publications/2019/12-02-19-jobs-are-changing-so-should-education.pdf)
Dear Clare,

I was grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to the Education & Skills Committee’s inquiry into subject choice at school on Wednesday 03 April 2019. I said I would follow that up with some information that I referred to during the session, and I am pleased to provide that now.

Subject choice by SIMD quintile

The information source I referred to in my evidence is the Fair Access Commissioner’s paper on retention, outcomes and destination, which includes information on entry, retention and attainment by subject grouping, differentiating between learners from SIMD20 postcodes and the rest. I attach a copy of this. It shows different patterns in subject choice between learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and their more privileged peers but does not make any assumptions about the extent to which this may reflect the range of subjects on offer at different schools.

Highers attainment by learners from different SIMD quintiles

I also attach analysis by Scottish Government of school leaver attainment by SIMD quintile. While this shows a trend of some improvement in the Highers-level attainment of learners from the most disadvantaged quintile, it also shows a clear differentiation in typical attainment at school level: for instance, Table 10 shows that in 2015/16 only 29 S6 school leavers from SIMD20 backgrounds had 5As at Higher, compared to 333 from the most privileged quintile. Again, this does not allow any direct inference to be drawn about the availability of subject choice in schools with disadvantaged populations.

Continued:
Continues:

**Success of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in admission to courses in medicine**

I referred in my oral evidence to the increasing success rate of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in getting into courses in medicine. The information I have from the Scottish Medical Schools Admissions Group on that does not disaggregate for SIMD20, because of the low numbers of applicants from that quintile. However, it does show a trend of cumulative improvement in the numbers of learners from the two least-privileged quintiles taken together (SIMD20 and SIMD40) who receive offers to study medicine and who accept these offers:

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<th>NO. SIMD 1st and 2nd Deprivation Quintile Applicants</th>
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<th>10/11</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rurality**

Oliver Mundell MSP referred to evidence from his constituents that the restriction in the numbers of subjects studied at rural schools was disadvantaging learners who wanted to apply for some courses at university. I said that Universities Scotland didn’t have access to a data set that would show nationally whether learners from rural schools were less likely to get into highly-selective courses, but that I would get in touch with the Scottish Funding Council to see whether they had data that would illustrate this issue. I have now written to Martin Smith, Chief Information Officer at SFC, to check whether they have access to relevant data.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer evidence to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Alastair Sim
Director
Education and Skills Committee

13th Meeting, 2019 (Session 5), Wednesday, 24 April 2019

Instrumental music tuition in schools – report responses

1. On 22 January 2019, the Committee published a report entitled “A note of concern: the future of instrumental music tuition in schools”.

2. The report summarised the findings of the Committee’s inquiry into instrumental music tuition in schools and made a number of recommendations to COSLA and the Scottish Government.

3. COSLA and the Scottish Government have replied to the Committee’s report, and these replies are attached as annexes to this paper.

4. Members will have an opportunity to debate the findings of the report, the responses from COSLA and the Scottish Government, and any other relevant information when the Committee debate on its report is held. This debate will take place on Tuesday 30 April.

5. The Committee is invited to consider these report responses.

Annexe A- Scottish Government

Annexe B- COSLA
Annexe A

Response from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills dated 26 March 2019

Education and Skills Committee report into instrumental music tuition in schools

Thank you for your letter of 28 January 2019 regarding the publication of the Education and Skills Committee’s report into instrumental music tuition in schools. I read the report with interest and am in complete agreement with the Committee in recognising music education as a great asset that can benefit children and young people in many ways, including through positively impacting attainment. I also recognise the important place of music education in relation to Scotland’s culture and economy.

As I highlighted in providing evidence for your inquiry, I share the concerns of Committee members, and of young people, their parents and carers and those working in the music education sector, over any reduction in participation in instrumental music tuition. I note the Committee’s conclusion that it “…respects the democratic right of local authorities to take decisions about local expenditure and acknowledge the financial choices they face” but that it “…believes in principle that music tuition should be provided free of charge in every local authority.” As I stated in Parliament on 7 February 2019, in response to question S5F-03043, I encourage all local authorities to reflect on that conclusion.

I am pleased to respond to the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations with the following remarks:

The status of instrumental music tuition in the curriculum

The Committee’s conclusions highlight the differing views it received in relation to whether instrumental music tuition is discretionary or is part of the core curriculum. The Committee has recognised that the inclusion of instrumental music tuition in the core curriculum would offer some benefits but has practical implications.

The expressive arts, including music, are an essential part of the Broad General Education under the Curriculum for Excellence. This can involve the learning of musical instruments on a whole class basis. In addition to this, some children and young people will receive instrumental music tuition. Decisions relating to the provision of instrumental music tuition are for education authorities and they have discretion in determining how to provide tuition, depending on local circumstances, priorities and traditions.

My firm view is that local authorities making those decisions should consider fully the range of benefits that learning a musical instrument can have for our children and young people and the positive impact it can have on well-being and attainment. It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that pupils in their area are not prevented from learning a musical instrument because of their background, location, disability or financial circumstances. I support the Committee’s conclusion that
aptitude tests should not be the sole basis for selecting pupils for instrumental music tuition.

Local authorities should also take full account of the child-centred focus of Curriculum for Excellence. In doing so there should be a recognition that for some young people, learning a specific instrument will be an important part of their personalised learner experience, one that should provide them the opportunities to maximise their individual potential.

Preparation for SQA qualifications

The Committee found a lack of clarity regarding whether instrumental music tuition providing preparation for SQA examinations could be subject to charging and it recommended the Scottish Government clarify the legal basis for such charges. There is no express statutory link between education authorities’ charging powers and the qualifications framework. However, the acquisition by pupils of formal educational qualifications is clearly a fundamental principle of school education, as provided by education authorities.

It is my view that instrumental music tuition which is necessary to provide adequate preparation for SQA examinations should be provided free of charge. In November 2018, COSLA’s Children and Young People Board agreed that instrumental music tuition should be provided free of charge to students studying for SQA qualifications, as well as to those who are entitled to Free School Meals.

Local Authority decision making

I welcome the Committee’s conclusion that it is not persuaded that a national instrumental music service could perform better than local services. The Scottish education system is set up in such a way that decision making is devolved to the most appropriate level, enabling local education authorities to make choices that meet their local circumstances and needs. This is a strength of the system in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has continued to ensure that our partners in local government receive a fair funding settlement despite further cuts to the Scottish Budget from the UK Government. We are delivering a funding package of £11.2 billion for all local authorities next year - a real terms increase of over £310 million for essential public services in Scotland.

While acknowledging the autonomy of local authorities to make these decisions, I have committed to working with key stakeholders to help ensure that instrumental music tuition remains accessible to all. As I highlighted in my evidence, this included accepting an invitation in 2018 for Scottish Government officials to join a working group, led by the chair of the Music Education Partnership Group and including representation from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). I am pleased that this group has co-produced guidance to support local authorities in their decision making in relation to instrumental music tuition policies.

This was published by COSLA on 25 January 2019 and can be found at: http://www.cosla.gov.uk/music-instrumental-music-tuition-guidance-2019pdf
The Committee will wish to note that the guidance:

- highlights the COSLA Children and Young People Board’s decision that instrumental music tuition should be provided free of charge to students who are entitled to Free School Meals or those studying for SQA qualifications;
- recommends local authorities review their charging policies and concessionary schemes to ensure that pupils in their area are not prevented from learning a musical instrument because of their background, location, disability or financial circumstances;
- promotes the sharing of good practice and information between local authorities; and
- places an emphasis on the need to appropriately engage parents and carers when making changes to fee levels, offering examples of good practice and recommending local authorities avoid issuing invoices to parents and carers of children receiving tuition without warning and explanation.

**Status of instrumental music tutors**

I am taking this opportunity to reiterate that the Scottish Government values the contribution of all those working in our schools. Instrumental music tutors play a critical role in our music education system and are clearly greatly valued by those they teach and their families. However, the pay and conditions of service of instrumental music tutors are matters for individual local authorities to consider, as employers, and the Scottish Government has no role in that process.

**Youth Music Initiative**

I am pleased that the Committee has welcomed the Scottish Government support for the Youth Music Initiative (YMI) as an example of good practice. Our investment in the YMI since 2007 now stands at £118 million and has made a significant impact, helping young people in all 32 local authorities access music-making opportunities and helping ensure every pupil is offered a year’s free music tuition by the end of primary school. In 2017/18, all 32 local authorities achieved the target of offering pupils a year’s free music tuition by the end of primary school with over 240,000 young people taking part in 2017/18 (195,000 in school, 45,000 out of school). The quality of evidence supporting the link between skills for learning, attainment and the YMI has also greatly improved.

In light of the positive impact of the YMI, Scottish Government officials have met with Creative Scotland to ensure the YMI builds on its many successes and provides pathways for children into future progression routes, including through local authority Instrumental Music Services.

I hope the Committee find these remarks helpful. I wish to thank the Committee for its interest in these issues and offer reassurance that I continue to be committed to working with stakeholders, including local authorities and the Music Education Partnership Group, to preserve instrumental music tuition in Scotland.

**JOHN SWINNEY**
Annexe B

Response from COSLA, dated 20 March 2019

Thank you for your letter of 28 January 2019 in relation to the publication of the Education and Skills Committee Report into instrumental music tuition: “A note of concern: The future of instrumental music tuition in schools”.

As I have previously stated both in writing, and in the oral evidence session to the Committee as part of the Inquiry, local authorities fully recognise the value of instrumental music tuition and the role that music plays in ensuring children and young people get the best from their time at school. As I noted in oral evidence, no local authority introduces charges for any service lightly but there needs to be a recognition of the financial constraints’ authorities are working with.

Since 2011/12 core funding to local authorities has reduced by £1.64 Billion in real terms a situation which means that authorities are facing a range of very difficult choices.

Our Children and Young People Board discussed the report when they met on 8 February 2019 and agreed an outline of this response. You will also be aware that COSLA have been working with Scottish Government and the Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG) to develop guidance to support local authorities in their decision making in relation to instrumental music tuition policies. The guidance was published in February, and we have shared a copy with the Committee clerk.

We note the report and the recommendations in places refers to music education, music tuition and instrumental music tuition as if they are all the same thing, and are all subject to charging, we feel that to avoid any misunderstanding it is important that the report describes the difference and the following quote from the original Report by the Instrumental Music Group in 2013 does that:

“In Scottish schools Music Education as a subject is part of the Expressive Arts curriculum area of Curriculum for Excellence. It is taught by GTCS registered teachers to young people from Primary 1 (median age 5) and throughout their broad general education phase of Curriculum for Excellence to Secondary 3 (median age 15). In the senior phase of school (ages 16-18), many pupils elect to take National (SQA) exams in music, which includes being able to demonstrate competence in two musical instruments. Students are also able to achieve recognition through taking external music examinations e.g. Associated Board (ABRSM), Trinity College, Rock School etc. and graded qualifications from any age choosing from a variety of different instruments / voice and in music theory.

Instrumental music tuition is an additional and discretionary service, provided by Local Authorities. As a discretionary service, Local Authorities decide what and how to provide instrumental music tuition depending on local circumstances, priorities and traditions. All Local Authorities in Scotland provide young people with the opportunity to develop the skills of playing a musical instrument where resources allow. Instrumental music tuition is highly valued – by young people themselves, their parents and families - and there are many examples of excellent practice in terms of instrumental music delivery and the benefits both musically and
educationally to young people. Learning to play a musical instrument also helps deliver Curriculum for Excellence with young musicians becoming successful in their learning as well as confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.”.

In relation to the recommendations in the report which relate directly to COSLA we have sought to respond in the order in which they are listed:

“The Committee believes there is a lack of clarity regarding whether instrumental music tuition necessary to provide adequate preparation for SQA examinations in the senior phase can legitimately be subject to charging. While COSLA states that instrumental music tuition is not statutory, there is a risk that this position interprets legislation in light of practice rather than adopt practice in light of legislation. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government clarifies in its response to this report the legal basis for such charges.”

COSLA will note the view expressed in the Scottish Government response to the Committee. It is important to note that all 32 local authorities have agreed not to charge children and young people who are taking SQA exams.

“The Committee recognises there are differing views regarding whether the status of music tuition is discretionary or part of the core curriculum. The Committee considers that the explicit inclusion of instrumental music tuition in the core curriculum would have practical implications, which would need to be carefully considered. However, the benefits in protecting and enhancing the provision of music tuition in schools could far outweigh these considerations.”

COSLA would agree that the inclusion of instrumental music tuition within the core curriculum would indeed have practical implications but also has potential financial consequences. It is unclear what impact such a move would have on the current flexibility that exists for the design and delivery of the curriculum locally. Moreover, this approach would also run counter to the development of polices on empowerment which should ensure that decisions on curriculum, staffing finance and improvement are taken as close to schools and children and young people as possible. There are also potential financial implications. This could include increased staff costs as well as any impact of the ability of councils to charge for the service.

“The Committee respects the democratic right of local authorities to take decisions about local expenditure and acknowledge the financial choices they face. However, the Committee believes in principle that music tuition should be provided free of charge in every local authority.”

COSLA welcomes the fact that the Committee recognises the importance of local democratic accountability in decision making. As we have noted no local authority takes the decision to charge for any service lightly. Decisions to charge are based on local needs including the overall financial situation in a particular authority. The in-principle belief that there should be no charging is probably shared by many Elected Members across Scotland’s local authorities. The Committee does not suggest how such a policy would be funded.

“The Committee supports the approach proposed by COSLA to ensure that, as a minimum, all children in receipt of free school meals across Scotland are fully exempt
The recently published guidance, which was developed by COSLA, Scottish Government and MEPG lists examples of various concessions across the country including sibling discounts. Other than the commitment to ensure there are no charges in any local authority for children eligible for Free School Meals the guidance does not seek consistent application of any particular concession.

“The Committee is also concerned at the weight of evidence that charging for tuition still adversely affects those who qualify for concessions and exemptions as well as families with an income just above the thresholds for these. While recognising that those authorities that charge have autonomy to choose their own thresholds, the Committee recommends that local authorities closely monitor the impact of their charging policies.”

The recently published guidance recommends that the impact of charging policies is monitored.

“The Committee does not believe that local authorities are fulfilling the recommendations of the Instrumental Music Group, particularly recommendation 3, which states that pupils’ individual circumstances should not be a barrier to their ability to access and benefit from instrumental music tuition.”

Concessions are in place as are other means of support for families such as those aimed at the cost of the school day. Where families are not eligible for concessions the decision whether to pay is ultimately linked to parental choice.

“The Committee therefore welcomes COSLA’s commitment to revisit the recommendations of the Instrumental Music Group and asks them as part of their response to this report to provide an update to the Committee on the implementation of the IMG recommendations and a timescale for fulfilling any remaining recommendations.”

There may have been a misunderstanding in relation to what COSLA committed to. Our intention is to ensure the guidance refers local authorities to the recommendations of the Instrumental Music Group when developing their charging policies, and it does that. MEPG is the successor to the Instrumental Music Implementation Group and they may have such information.

“The Committee understands that oversubscribed instrumental music services need to make decisions about which pupils can and cannot access their service. However, the Committee believes that aptitude tests, which have a number of legitimate uses, should not be used as the sole basis for selecting pupils for instrumental music tuition and recommends that local authorities avoid doing so in future.”

There is no indication what secondary basis the Committee is suggesting. It is possible that such an action would risk accusations of being inequitable if those with the most aptitude are overlooked.
“The Committee notes that there have been a number of inquiries, reports and strategies produced regarding instrumental music tuition over the last 20 years. While reaching broadly similar conclusions, responses to each have failed to address the ‘tipping point’ concerns regarding the future of IMT in schools. The Committee believes that unless the fundamental issue of the status of IMT within the curriculum and associated teaching provision is addressed then it will continue to be treated materially differently from other subjects. We urge the Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities to reflect upon this when responding to this report.”

The Committee will be aware that I have repeatedly made the point that concerns about the sustainability of Instrumental Music Tuition are due to funding pressures on local authorities and the need to take difficult decisions when setting budgets. All 32 local authorities were clear that decisions on whether to charge should remain within local authority control. Where charging is in place it plays a significant role in protecting the instrumental music tuition service. In the current funding environment without the ability to charge there would quite clearly be concerns over the future of IMT in schools. COSLA would also be concerned that changing the status of Instrumental Music Tuition within the curriculum in an attempt to protect the service from consideration in budget setting risks putting pressure on other areas of local authority provision. Absorbing costs would fall on other important areas of local authority provision in order to achieve balanced budgets.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this response to the Committee.

Stephen McCabe
COSLA Children and Young People Spokesperson
Education and Skills Committee

13th Meeting, 2019 (Session 5), Wednesday 24 April 2019

Subordinate Legislation

Introduction

1. This paper is to inform the Committee’s consideration of a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI) subject to the negative procedure –

   Teachers’ Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Amendment Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/95)

2. The instrument is subject to the negative procedure which means that it will come into force unless the Committee, and subsequently the Parliament, agrees a motion to annul the instrument. No motions to annul have been lodged for this instrument.

Purpose of the instrument

3. In the Policy Note for the instrument, the Scottish Government states that its purpose is as follows:

   This instrument will amend the commencement date and rate of the employer contribution rate set out in The Teachers’ Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/48). Since SSI 2019/48 was laid on 13 February 2019, details of the UK Government spending to cover the cost of the increases in employer contributions have been confirmed. That funding reflects the fact that the Teachers’ scheme in England and Wales is deferring its employer contribution increase until 1 September 2019. To avoid a significant shortfall in funding for 2019-20 for the Scottish Teachers’ scheme a similar deferment is to be applied to the employer contribution increase.

4. The Committee considered SSI 2019/48 at its meeting on 20 March 2019, aware of the intention for a further amending SSI to change the commencement date and rate, and had no comments to make.

5. When considering SSI 2019/48 on 20 March, the following explanation was given to the clerks by the Scottish Public Pensions Agency for the change made by this amending SSI to the implementation date and the employer contribution rate:

   “All unfunded public service pensions schemes are subject to an increase in employer contribution rates following recent scheme valuations. This increase is principally due to the UK Government’s decision to reduce the discount rate used in the valuation of unfunded public service schemes. In announcing that change UK Government confirmed it would provide funding in support of these costs and the exact level of funding has still to be confirmed with HM Treasury. Although HM Treasury were aware that for the Teachers scheme in
Scotland it was planned to introduce the increase in employer contributions from 1 April 2019, the proposed share of the additional funding reflects the fact that the Teachers’ scheme in England and Wales is deferring the increase of employer contributions until 1 September. The employer contribution rate in England and Wales was increased to take account of the later implementation period. This means that the Scottish Government’s share of the additional 2019/20 funding for the Teachers’ scheme is based on costs covering the period 1 September 2019 to 31 March 2019 rather than the whole financial year.

Retaining an implementation date of 1 April creates a significant shortfall between the costs being incurred and the expected additional funding that will be provided for 2019/20. To better manage that shortfall, the employer contribution increase for the Scottish Teachers’ scheme needs to be deferred to the 1 September 2019. The cost for deferring the increase adds 0.6% to the employer rate taking the revised rate to 23% which will be due from 1 September 2019 to 31 March 2023."

6. The SPPA also provided further background on the funding discussions with HM Treasury:

“We expected HM Treasury to provide clarity on additional funding for pensions schemes in relation to the increases in employer contributions as part of the 2019 UK Spring Statement – but that did not happen. The Scottish Government continues to engage with HMT on this urgent issue and will contact public bodies on the funding implications as soon as we obtain the necessary clarity from the UK Government.”

**Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee**

7. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee reported on the instrument on 26 March 2019.

8. The DPLR Committee noted that:

The Regulations were laid before the Parliament on 18 March 2019 and come into force on 1 April 2019. This does not respect the requirement that at least 28 days should elapse between the laying of an instrument which is subject to the negative procedure and the coming into force of that instrument.

9. The Scottish Public Pensions Agency has explained its reasons for not complying with this requirement in a letter to the Presiding Officer, which is at Annexe A of this paper. The DPLR Committee found the failure to comply with this requirement to be acceptable in the circumstances.
Timescales for this Committee

10. Should the Committee wish to report on this instrument, the deadline to do so is 6 May 2019.

Action

11. The Committee is invited to consider this instrument.

Clerk to the Committee
April 2019
Annexe A: Letter from the Scottish Public Pensions Agency to the Presiding Officer

Breach of laying requirements: letter to the Presiding Officer

The Teachers’ Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Amendment Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/95), were made by the Scottish Ministers under section 9 and schedule 3 of the Superannuation Act 1972 and section 1(1) and (2)(d) and paragraph 4(b) of schedule 2 of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 on 14 March 2019. It is being laid before the Scottish Parliament today, 18 March 2019, and comes into force on 1 April 2019.

Section 28(2) of the Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out that a negative SSI must be laid before the Scottish Parliament at least 28 days before the instrument comes into force. On this occasion, this has not been complied with and, to meet the requirements of section 31(3) that Act, this letter explains why.

The Teachers’ Superannuation and Pension Scheme (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2019, SSI 2019/48 was made by the Scottish Ministers under section 9 and schedule 3 of the Superannuation Act 1972 and section 1(1) and (2)(d) and paragraph 4(b) of schedule 2 of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 on 13 February 2019. This instrument is currently under consideration and is scheduled to implement an increase in the scheme employer contribution rate from 1 April 2019. This followed a valuation of the scheme which sets employer contribution rates.

Increases in employer contributions are common to all unfunded public service schemes from 2019 and the principal reason for those increases is the UK Government’s decision to reduce the discount rate used in the valuation process. As a result of that change, the UK Government confirmed it would provide funding to schemes in support of those additional costs. That funding is still to be formally confirmed, but, on 21 February, proposed details were received by Scottish Government officials which confirmed that the additional funding would be calculated using the Barnett formula.

Although HM Treasury were aware that Scottish Ministers planned to introduce the increase in employer contributions from 1 April 2019, the proposed share of the additional funding reflects the fact that the Teachers’ scheme in England and Wales is deferring its increase of employer contributions until 1 September. The employer contribution rate to be paid in England and Wales was increased to take account of the later implementation period. This means that the Scottish Government’s share of the additional 2019-20 funding for the Teachers’ scheme is based on costs covering the period 1 September 2019 to 31 March 2020 rather than the whole financial year.

Retaining an implementation date of 1 April creates a significant shortfall between the costs being incurred and the funding provided for 2019-20. Therefore, Scottish Ministers have decided that, to better manage that shortfall, the employer contribution increase for the Scottish Teachers’ scheme should be similarly deferred to 1 September. The cost for deferring the increase will be an additional 0.6% to the employer rate, taking the revised rate to 23% from 1 September.
This instrument is required to ensure that the employer contribution rate, as set out in SSI 2019/48 (22.4% from 1 April 2019), is not applied and the increase in employer contributions is deferred until 1 September 2019. This change allows scheme employers greater preparation time for the change and will allow final details on funding to be confirmed prior to the change being implemented.

I would like to apologise that the 28 day rule cannot be met on this instrument. Provisional details of the proposed HMT funding were not received until 21 February (final confirmation is still awaited) and the short time available to confirm and apply this change has meant that it has not been possible to meet the 28 day rule. I am conscious of the requirement and the importance it plays in the Parliamentary process, but unfortunately this instrument must have effect from 1 April 2019 to ensure that the correct employer contributions are applied in the Scottish Teachers’ Pension schemes.