

# Education, Children and Families Committee

10 am, Tuesday 7th December 2021

## Response to the Consultation on Education Reform

Executive/routine  
Wards  
Council Commitments 34

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to
  - 1.1.1 Note the response to the Muir Consultation
  - 1.1.2 Request updates on how the Education Reform proposals will be addressed through strategic planning within Education and Children's Services

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# Report

## Response to Consultation on Education Reform

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report sets out the response from officers to the Consultation on Education Reform, as set out in the recommendations from the OECD [report](#). The response represents early years, primary and secondary sectors of education. In general terms it supports the continuation of Curriculum for Excellence, though strongly suggests that it is refreshed. The consultation response supports the formation of a new agency to link the curriculum and the assessment of knowledge and skills. It also supports the de-coupling of the inspectorate from Education Scotland and a revised approach to quality assuring schools, more in line with the collaborative and empowered system.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 The Scottish Government commissioned a report from the OECD which was published in June 2021. Professor Ken Muir was appointed as Independent Advisor to the Scottish Government. In August 2021 the plans for consultation were published and ran from September to November. All interested parties were asked for views. This response has been collated by three subject matter experts, namely Quality Improvement Education Officers working in the relevant sectors of education.

### 4. Main report

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- 4.1 The Consultation focused on 4 areas: Vision; Curriculum and Assessment; Roles and Responsibilities; and Replacing the Scottish Qualifications Agency and Reforming Education Scotland.
- 4.2 Vision: the response from the City of Edinburgh agrees with the vision of Curriculum for Excellence but strongly suggests it is fully refreshed to reflect our rapidly changing society. It also suggests redefining the balance of the contexts for learning to reflect parity of pathways and transferrable skills within the workplace.
- 4.3 Curriculum and Assessment: the response sets out the view that there is currently a disconnect between early years education, broad general and the senior phase and that these should be realigned to ensure clear progression. It further agrees with the

proposition that a new agency should replace SQA and that this agency should address the misalignment between the curriculum and its assessment thereof.

- 4.4 Roles and Responsibilities: more work is needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various parts of the system, as well as the tools by which staff navigate them. Inspection should be independent but should be reconstituted with reference to other inspection frameworks, such as Care Inspectorate. The models of independent inspection should reflect the empowered system.
- 4.5 Replacing the SQA and reforming Education Scotland: although the pace of change needs to be carefully considered, there is no doubt that change is needed to reform the agency which accredits learning and skills, the SQA. The role of Education Scotland in providing curricular support should be continued, however this needs to be done recognising the whole system, including the role of RICs. Duplication should be avoided, similarly a genuine appraisal of the worth of the various contributions that each sector can make to the outcomes of pupils in schools.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 Once the results of the consultation are published, the authority will work with colleagues, parents, and young people to agree appropriate next steps.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 None envisage at this stage of Reform.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 This consultation has sought views from all stakeholders. It has been discussed with Parent Councils and the Locality Parent Council Forums. Headteachers respond separately through their professional associations or other forums. One view expressed from the Locality Parent Council was on the technical vocabulary used in the consultation questions which may have precluded some groups from responding.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 [OECD Report Curriculum for Excellence](#)
- 8.2 [OECD Report Improving Schools in Scotland](#)

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 Appendix 1 Consultation Response from officers

# Response to Consultation on Education Reform by the City of Edinburgh Council

## SECTION 1 - VISION

Two decades have passed since the original vision for Curriculum for Excellence was set out. In 2019, a revised narrative on Curriculum for Excellence was published which aimed to update the original vision<sup>12</sup>. Since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, there have been marked changes in educational research giving rise to new insights into children and young people's learning, pedagogy, and the kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to progress as learners.

*“Scotland’s curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence – helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century.”*  
[Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence \(scotlandscurriculum.scot\)](http://scotlandscurriculum.scot)

**As an introduction to the questions which follow in this consultation, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**

**1.1 The vision for Curriculum for Excellence reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

## 1.2 What do you think should be retained and/or changed?

The attributes and capabilities of the four capacities were seminal at the time however need to be reviewed and updated in line with the current and rapidly changing context. The climate crisis, ethics, as we consider advances in Artificial Intelligence and multi national conglomerates running social media should influence decisions about the vision of education in Scotland. Learning for Life has to be acknowledged as citizens change jobs, develop skills, work flexibly and exert their rights as employees and in the classroom. The concept of learning for life at once suggests learning beyond the classroom so invites our partners in business, industry and the care professions to support curriculum development, therefore a Heads Hands Heart approach which places equal weigh on all skills should be developed.

A more equitable balance needs to be sought between being a “successful learner” and the other three capacities. There needs to be greater articulation on what it means to be a “learner” in modern Scotland; this includes addressing wider skills such as co-construction, cooperation and problem solving.

The four contexts of learning are more problematic when viewed from an ELC perspective as they don't currently align to ELC pedagogy. Currently there is a vision of the educator being the teacher: this needs to be adapted to include ELC settings where there is a wider skilled workforce.

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## SECTION 2 - CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

The OECD reports *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*<sup>13</sup> and *Upper-Secondary Education Student Assessment in Scotland: A Comparative Perspective*<sup>14</sup> make it clear that aligning curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation is essential to delivering on the commitments made in Curriculum for Excellence relating to assessment.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**2.1 Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree/Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2.2 Please share what you believe currently contributes to a coherent progression.

The Experiences and Outcomes throughout the Broad General Education as a whole provide a coherent framework for progression through the learning statements within the sequential organisation of the levels but not from 3-18.

2.3 Please share ideas you may have to improve learner progression across stages and sectors.

As per the OECD report, greater consideration needs to be given to the role of the knowledge in the curriculum and its relation to the development of skills. There needs to be a greater input from subject experts on the building blocks of knowledge as often we find out too late that keystones of knowledge are missing in our young people's education. We need to give greater consideration to depth so that our pupils have the opportunity to critically engage with knowledge, questioning its purpose and using it to build new ways of thinking.

The four capacities, if or when they are updated, need to be more evidently unpacked in the Experiences and Outcomes and go beyond their current role as statements of principles. It would make sense to review the Es and Os and the benchmarks together to produce a more coherent overview. (This would also allow the opportunity to review some of the content of Early Level, which does not match well with pedagogical approaches.)

There is a need for more coherence at points of transition particularly between primary and secondary sectors. This could be created by the introduction of "transition teachers" who could ensure pupils have a more coherent educational experience. Consideration should be given to the education of these teachers in ITE.

From an ELC perspective, strong foundations in motor/communication/thinking skills/relationships – developmental domains - underpin all learning. We question the need to artificially box up areas of learning for the youngest children into curricular areas at the expense of the individual child's curriculum.

We have to recognise that progression is less coherent when it comes to the Senior Phase and that the transition from S3 to S4 has proved problematic in particular. With regard to specific qualifications, the lack of progression/commonality in certain science and mathematics National Qualifications needs addressed, so that pupil achievement can be recognised and rewarded.

**3.1 In practice, learning communities are empowered and use the autonomy provided by Curriculum for Excellence to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

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**3.2 Please share ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance this in future.**

CfE has indeed led to empowerment, however the disconnect between Early Years, the BGE and senior phase does not currently allow for a shared curriculum. While the current formal assessment/exam diet largely determines the senior phase curriculum, there will be a lack of motivation to make the relevant changes.

The constant stream of initiatives has led to a lack of focus on what the curriculum is trying to achieve. In particular, there is a need for stronger relationships to be built between schools, teachers, community librarians, social workers and subject experts in order to ensure that the curriculum is built upon a sound and relevant knowledge base particularly in Literacy, Numeracy as well as in the development of Technological and Scientific Literacy.

**4.1 The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency will help to address the misalignment of curriculum and assessment as outlined in the OECD report<sup>15</sup>.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

**4.2 Please share your views of the potential advantages of establishing such an Agency.**

This agency has the potential to help build a stronger relationship between the curriculum and assessment.

If the curriculum is to refocus attention upon achieving the vision for our learners in Scotland then assessment practices, particularly in the Senior Phase, need to be updated. Teacher-driven formative assessment should be included which will help to assess other skills such as collaboration and problem solving. This new agency has the potential to bring coherence between the principles of the Curriculum for Excellence, the taught curriculum in schools and the assessment guidelines through the establishment of an appropriate infrastructure and

system which will support practice.

With regard to ELC, this agency would also need to look at pedagogy.

4.3 Please share your views of the potential disadvantages of establishing such an Agency.

The practical link would reinforce the ideological link between what is taught and how it is assessed. This would have huge advantages in keeping pace with the changes in society which will inevitably be seen in the curriculum

There is anxiety amongst Scottish educationalists that this new agency will simply be a re-branding of the old format. This is a great opportunity to learn from other countries who may already have specialist curriculum agencies. There is a hope that the staff for this agency could have a specialist skill set in order to develop the expert knowledge which will be crucial for its success.

Previously the qualifications system implemented by SQA has ended up dictating the curriculum “further down” – there is a need to work from foundations upwards instead.

We are concerned that previously with SQA there was no recourse to any ombudsman. The formation of any new body needs to address this. Given the amount of power which this new body would wield, it is vital that there be mechanisms in place to ensure public accountability.

**5.1 The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications<sup>16</sup> play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

5.2 Please identify the main factors, if any, that support a broader range of SQA qualifications being included in the curriculum in secondary schools.

Parity of pathway will never be fully realized without broader, accredited qualifications that reflect back on the vision, values and aims of CfE, which itself should be the VVA of our society.

Currently the range of qualifications offered is affected by factors such as school size, parental expectations, authority position and the demography of the catchment area. There are also issues with how some (non-National Qualification) courses are perceived by learners and parents/carers, with a sense that these are somehow “second class” or of lesser importance. Whilst SQA are to be applauded for introducing NQs such as National 5 and Higher Applications of Mathematics, the value of these has not always been recognised by employers, nor by some Further/Higher Education institutions.



There is a clear opportunity to widen the range of courses by taking advantage of digital accessibility. National frameworks to support this development would be welcome and would save much wheel reinvention.

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<sup>15</sup> [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future | en | OECD](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Explore our qualifications - SQA](#)

5.3 Please share any ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance the role of a broader variety of qualifications in the curriculum in secondary schools.

Beginning with the refreshed VVA of CfE, which must be done with business partners and those who have the insight and skill to predict societal, industrial and technological skills, we should then be clear about how the current framework can be used to assess relevant skills. There should be a greater understanding of Learning for Life.

**6.1 Technologies are fully and appropriately utilised as a support for curriculum and assessments.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

6.2 Please share any comments you may have on the use of technologies to support curriculum and assessments, and what could be done to deliver improvements.

There is a need to continue to build on the digital literacy of our learners. The curriculum has to be modified so that learners have the opportunity not only to develop new ways to use technology to extend their knowledge and skills but also to be able to determine how and for what purpose technology should be used. In order to ensure that this is truly a Scottish priority, there needs to be equity of access to appropriate equipment, connectivity as well as a prioritising the training of the educational workforce.

**7. Please share any additional comments you have on curriculum and assessment.**

## SECTION 3 - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The rationale for reform of Scottish education is to ensure that learning communities get the best possible support to provide the highest quality of learning and teaching for our children and young people. The aim is to continue to reduce the attainment gap and reduce variability in outcomes achieved by young people in different parts of the country.

*Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*<sup>17</sup> recognises the complexity in Scottish education and highlights duplication of functions between different groups. It is claimed that this reduces clarity and consistency for practitioners and points to the need for Scotland's system leaders and stakeholders to revise the current allocation of responsibility for Curriculum for Excellence, including responsibilities for its strategic direction, its reviews and updates, and the response to needs and/or requests for support with curriculum issues.

A key challenge in improving the transparency of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms surrounding Curriculum for Excellence is in ensuring that the functions of agencies are designed in a way that maximises support for achieving excellence and equity for all children and young people from the early level upwards.

Building on a commitment to shared ownership of Curriculum for Excellence, the report therefore points to the need for improved clarity on functions and simplification of guidance for all stakeholders in order that the system is more coherent and more easily understood by all, allowing a greater focus on learning and teaching.

### To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

#### 8.1 There is clarity on where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree/Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

#### 8.2 Please indicate where you think the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence should lie.

The strategic direction of the Curriculum for Excellence should be developed and overseen by an expert panel or Board, made up of personnel beyond those in traditional education roles. It must be made up of people whose own values render them open to change and alert to new approaches, but wise enough to have a long term view of implementation. There should be clear Roles, Remits and Responsibilities for all involved, clear self-evaluation of what works and also independent scrutiny at points.

This group should then remit work to various other agencies, with a strong and enduring link to practitioners. This network should represent the diversity of our education system and should work in partnership with the new Curriculum and

Assessment agency as well as a range of key stakeholders and educational experts. There needs to be a clearer message throughout our education system that our school leaders and teachers are trusted, empowered professionals. Any changes and updates of the curriculum need to be supported by a rigorous professional learning offer which provides practical support and expertise. To ensure success however, there needs to be a reduction in class contact time in order to avoid teachers from feeling overwhelmed as well as giving any changes the time and space which will be greatly needed.

**9.1 There is clarity on the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs for support with curriculum and assessment issues.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

9.2 Please share which aspects of the support currently provided by national agencies and other providers is working well.

The GTCS has played a consistent role in establishing and promoting professional standards. As a body, they continue to engage in a dialogue about what works, which is evident in the recent refreshment of the standards.

The system is imperfect, however there are personnel within it who add enormous value. There is not enough interface between local authorities/schools and the agencies delivering support and challenge. There has sometime been a sense of strategic and costly decisions being taken which are not seen as necessary or helpful. There is a lack of clarity over what support is being driven by the Learning Directorate and what by Education Scotland. There is a growing sense of the Learning Directorate's influence in educational strategy which has not been overtly articulated to the profession, particularly in assuming roles that would previously have been undertaken by Education Scotland. It would be helpful if clear lines of responsibility were set out even in this interim period.

9.3 Please indicate where you think greater clarity is needed in relation to the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs / requests for support with curriculum and assessment issues.

With regard to ELC, a joint framework (developed by HMIE and the Care Inspectorate) would be supportive for practitioners moving forward. Early Level is of vital importance and is poorly served by having two inspection regimes cutting across it.

**10.1 There is clarity on where high quality support for leadership and professional learning can be accessed to support practitioners.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

10.2 Please share any comments you may have on support for leadership and professional learning.

There are effective leadership and professional learning pathways currently available for practitioners at all stages of their career. However, the current systems on Education Scotland, in particular, can be difficult to navigate. Consideration needs to be given on clarity around communication and accessibility onto the individual pathways. It can be difficult to understand who has ownership of the professional learning menu as well as how and where to apply. This needs to be a simplified process which will encourage a greater uptake.

On the whole, Education Scotland does draw upon various areas of expertise in order to support the content and delivery of their professional learning as is evident in the Excellence in Headship programme. Practitioners at all levels have the opportunity to engage directly with theory and research. Partnership working is strong between Universities and Education Scotland in the delivery of Into Headship. Consideration needs to be given on the quality of all the leadership programmes, in particular the In Headship course does not have the same strength as other packages.

The role of Regional Collaboratives needs strengthened in terms of connecting practitioners and in providing a network of support for professional learning. If we are to develop strong professional learning pathways for all practitioners then there is a need to provide spaces for collaboration, to discuss theory as well as practice.

**11.1 There is sufficient trust with all stakeholders, including children, young people, parents & carers, so they are genuinely involved in decision making.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

11.2 Please share any ideas you may have on how trust and decision making can be further improved.

There have been strides towards this however there are ingrained and critically important statutory practices which prevent wholesale empowerment of every stakeholder. The Headteacher Charter seems to be written to serve a context which operates under a different funding mechanism. The enormous structural changes needed for full empowerment do not seem appropriate for these times or this context. Better the incremental steps towards better fiscal decision making which are ongoing

through Excellence in Headship and local authority training packages (Edinburgh has specific packages for HTs and BMs); better also to develop appropriate training and support for parent councils and Headteachers on skilled joint improvement planning, bearing in mind that not every parent wants to assume this role.

More work needs to be done on the inclusive nature of our curriculum. A stronger commitment and promotion should be made of the development of a decolonised curriculum which reflects the culture of all our learners. This will again help to build feelings of trust.

Parents and carers need to be involved in understanding the new purpose of education and why changes need to be made. The lack of transparency on this has led in the past to the questioning of our role as professionals. There needs to be more diversity in who is consulted and included in forming the new shape of Scottish education. From the outset, there now needs to be a strategic plan on when, how and for what purpose parents and carers are consulted and involved in decision making.

However, we recognise that there can be different views across parent bodies. It is important to ensure that consultations hear from all voices as much as possible.

**12.1 Independent inspection has an important role to play in scrutiny and evaluation, enhancing improvement and building capacity.**

- Strongly Agree*
- Agree*
- Neither Agree/Disagree*
- Disagree*
- Strongly Disagree*

12.2 Please give examples of how you would like to see scrutiny and evaluation being carried out in future.

Scrutiny and evaluation is an essential part of ensuring public trust and in maintaining and improving educational standards. This needs to be executed in a supportive manner: too often there is an element of fear which results in conformity and a lack of exploration of new, creative pedagogical approaches and curricula. The embracing of the word 'scrutiny' should be reconsidered – the connotations do not seem reflective of the culture or context.

It is vital to ensure that there is genuine independence when it comes to any inspecting body – there needs to be clear demarcation (and political distance) between the roles of the Learning Directorate and this body.

It is important that to ensure that there is clarity around function of Care Inspectorate and HMIE in ELC inspections.

**13. Please share any additional comments on roles and responsibilities in Scotland's education system.**

## **SECTION 4 - REPLACING THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY AND REFORMING EDUCATION SCOTLAND**

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced in June 2021 the intention to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and consider a new specialist agency for both curriculum and assessment while also taking forward reform of Education Scotland, including removing the function of inspection or scrutiny from the agency. This section seeks views on how best to take forward key aspects of the Cabinet Secretary's decision including:

- **Removing Scrutiny (Inspection and review) from Education Scotland**
- **Further reform of Education Scotland**
- **Replacing SQA**
- **Considering the establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment Agency**

While it is expected to take some time to establish new or revised national agencies, it is anticipated that they will have a key role in taking forward delivery of wider OECD recommendations. This would include embedding a refreshed vision for Curriculum for Excellence, defining indicators to understand progress across the four capacities, building curricular capacity, implementing new pedagogical and assessment practices, implementing approaches for internal assessment in determining qualifications, ensuring appropriate breadth and depth of learning through the Broad General Education<sup>18</sup> and in respect of the Senior Phase<sup>19</sup>, embedding a structured and long-term approach to implementation, effective stakeholder engagement and coherent communications.

To assist you in answering these questions, information on the current roles and functions carried out by SQA and Education Scotland are provided within the supporting documents section at <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781802014327/documents/>.

### **Removing Scrutiny (Inspection and review) from Education Scotland**

External scrutiny (inspection and review) plays a fundamental role in the overall drive to continue to improve education in Scotland for all of our children, young people and adult learners. HM Inspectors carry out independent, external evaluation of standards, quality and improvement with a clear focus on impact and outcomes for learners. The scrutiny programme covers all sectors from early learning and childcare to adult learning. The evidence gathered through observing practice at first hand identifies what is working well in our education system, including examples of highly effective practice, areas which are showing improvement and areas where further development is needed.

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<sup>18</sup> [Broad general education | Scottish education system | Education Scotland](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Senior phase | Senior phase and beyond | Scottish education system | Education Scotland](#)



**14. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.**

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example what form should this agency take)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example the development of a new national approach to inspection including alignment with other scrutiny functions)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example whether the independence of the inspectorate could be jeopardised by change)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

Inspectors too often witness a snapshot of teaching which provides a certain lens of judgement to be applied. Consideration needs to be given as to how accurate this lens is and to what extent it contributes to the school's journey of improvement. Too often an inspection disturbs the flow of learning by the two-week notice where all hands are directed towards "preparation", the week of the inspection when anxieties are high followed by the inevitable slump of energies following the visit.

The new agency should consider a less hierarchical approach which involves more classroom practitioners. A co-construction of school quality criteria by which the school wish to be judged rather than a focus on outcomes may help to empower the process from within.

The risks are that political pressures result in the application of an overly simplistic framework by which quality is measured. Now is the time to be brave and try a different way of assuring quality. By putting valuable time aside to consult throughout the current education system, and listening, potential for an agency restricted by political frameworks will be reduced.

We question the view that there is currently "Independence" for the inspectorate, which could be jeopardised by any changes.

**Further Reform of Education Scotland**

Beyond inspection Education Scotland is a broad organisation responsible for a range of important functions designed to support a number of parts of the Scottish Education system. These functions include directly supporting learning communities at local and regional levels, offering a wide range of professional learning and leadership development programmes and opportunities, Community Learning and Development (including the CLD Standards Council), supporting digital pedagogies and as the function of Registrar of Independent Schools.

**15. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on how the functions currently housed in Education Scotland could be reformed.**

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example which functions should continue to sit within a reformed Education Scotland, and are there any

- functions which could be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities reform could present (for example should more prominence be given to aspects of Education Scotland's role)
  - c) the risks associated with any reform (for example disruption of service to education establishments and settings)
  - d) how any risks might be mitigated
  - e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

There is a danger that we have too "top heavy" a system in Scotland. We would welcome increased opportunities for collaboration with Local Authorities (or via the RICs) and also a more equitable distribution of resources to where they are most needed.

If the new Curriculum and Assessment Agency's primary function will be to stabilise the development of the Curriculum for Excellence then Education Scotland's role needs to continue to develop the essential supportive professional learning pathways. This could include greater curricular support from subject specialists.

Reference Groups and genuine active listening and dialogue should mitigate risks. Education establishments will not be unduly, directly affected by changes to ES.

Change management of these proposals needs to be moderated and sense-checked according to the context. The capacity of staff to cope with change that is not clear, sharp and swift will be limited. The preference would be for the Inspectorate to disengage from Education Scotland as soon as possible but for inspection (in its historical sense) to be paused until the profession can adequately respond.

If the new Curriculum and Assessment Agency's primary function will be to stabilise the development of the Curriculum for Excellence then Education Scotland's role needs to continue to develop the essential supportive professional learning pathways.

### **Replacing SQA**

SQA has two main roles: accreditation and awarding qualifications.

- **SQA Accreditation** accredits qualifications other than degrees and approves and quality assures awarding bodies that plan to enter people for these qualifications.
- **SQA Awarding Body** devises and develops national and vocational qualifications across schools, colleges, training providers and employers; sets standards and maintains such qualifications; validates qualifications (makes sure they are well written and meet the needs of learners and practitioners); reviews qualifications to ensure they are up to date; arranges for, assists in, and carries out, the assessment of people taking SQA qualifications; quality-assures education and training establishments which offer SQA qualifications; and issues certificates to candidates.

Within both of these roles, SQA offers a range of services for businesses and training providers, ranging from course and centre approval through customised awards, to endorsement, credit rating and licensing services.

### **16. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.**

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example could a function be carried out elsewhere)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example should more prominence be given to an aspect of SQA's role)
- c) the risks associated with any reform (for example loss of income, confusion as to system of awards in Scotland)
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

Gordon Stobart's report, "Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective" has distilled it down to three areas for us to consider when it comes to revising our assessment body. A dependable assessment system needs to be valid, reliable and manageable. These three words need to be at the forefront when considering any change to our current system. We need to be certain that this new agency develops an assessment system which is truly representative of the principles of our Scottish curriculum and has teacher professional judgement at the heart of it.

The framework which is employed in the Senior Phase is out of step with the key principles which underpin the Curriculum for Excellence. There is a heavy emphasis upon "successful learner" with

little opportunity to have progression within the other three capacities acknowledged. This has resulted in a system which is led schools to focus attention on Insight tally points, SQA attainment data and positive destination data. This narrowed criteria for judging success has lessened the focus on whether schools have nurtured creativity and developed critical thinkers, collaborators and problem solvers.

Consideration should be given to extending the range of assessment practices in the Senior Phase. There needs to be sharper focus on what we are assessing, why and how that relates to the curriculum. We question the need for the three years' worth of examinations in the Senior Phase. We believe it would be better to have a more cohesive approach rather than the stop/start and the "two term dash" which is currently in place, in S4, S5 and S6. The role of examinations in S4 in particular requires attention, given the current pattern of school staying-on rates compared to the position when O Grades were introduced.

There are clear risks involved in changing our current qualification methodology. The current societal view on final exams being the accepted way to measure attainment and achievement means that there may be resistance from parents/carers, further education institutions and the wider workplace on accepting a move towards more continual assessment approaches. This can be mitigated, as with all proposed changes, through a thorough programme of consultation and engagement in order for all to have a shared understanding of the validity and reliability of the national awards.

The move towards teacher designed assessments with greater emphasis upon the development of a portfolio of work has obvious implications for teacher workload. The government need to ensure that any change in approach is considered in conjunction with an increase in teachers' non-contact time.

## **Considering the Establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment Agency**

The establishment of new Agency has the potential to enhance the quality of teaching and learning across the education sector. It will be important that the remit, purpose, governance and culture of the new agency match the aspirations of the system it will be designed to serve. We are therefore interested in the role of the new agency, its relationship with other parts of the system including the Scottish Ministers and how we will know it has been successful.

### **17. Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.**

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- a) the approach this reform should take (for example are there alternative models for this reform?)
- b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example what should the role of the new agency be?)
- c) the risks associated with any reform
- d) how any risks might be mitigated
- e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

The new curriculum and assessment agency should primarily ensure that education objectives are simplified and aligned. Currently there are too many layers with competing agendas. This overcomplication has resulted in a confusion of purpose in Scottish education.

The OECD report suggests the newly formed agency should create ‘...the most effective balance between flexibility and prescription and between personalisation and equity’. This can only be achieved through the reimagining of the role of assessment, moving away from the current rigid measures of achievement.

The risks are that this agency bends against the ebb and flow of various political priorities. If we are to truly succeed in this endeavour, then this new curriculum and assessment agency needs to be apolitical.