

## EDUCATION REFORM CONSULTATION: A RESPONSE FROM THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH EDUCATION COMMITTEE

### Section 1 Vision

- It is important to note that Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) as envisioned in 2004 was met in general with acceptance across professional and political spheres. The crux of CfE's problems is rooted in its implementation – beginning in 2010 – and how this has diverged from what was originally conceived.
- Another significant shortcoming in CfE's implementation has been a lack of clarity and hence a lack of adherence to an overarching curriculum philosophy, inevitably leading to inconsistent interpretations and unclear priorities.
- The data which is often cited as a measure of CfE's success remains controversial. There are widely held perceptions that National 5 and Higher attainment rates are the key measure of school and learner attainment.

### Section 2 Curriculum and Assessment

#### *Progression*

- The lack of a seamless progression in learner pathways from Broad General Education (BGE) to senior phase qualifications, in whatever form these may emerge, seems to be the central and most important challenge to CfE as it is currently structured.
- There is scope to consider how the early secondary years could be better utilised, particularly as a tool for managing the transition between BGE and the later senior years, with their increased pace of learning.
- Fundamentally, there is a need for a clear and universally supported definition of what is expected at the end of each stage of education in Scotland, with respect to the content of learning, level of attainment, and qualifications to be acquired, if any.

#### *Autonomy and empowerment under Curriculum for Excellence*

- The degree to which schools choose – or are indeed able – to make use of CfE's flexibility is unclear, as are its impacts on the deployment of teaching staff and on timetabling.
- Collaboration between schools, colleges and universities has a major role to play in building curricular capacity.
- Societal perception of the value of so-called 'non-traditional pathways' that do not lead to a university course will be essential in expanding the variety of courses that are available to and taken up by young people.

***Developing a new curriculum and assessment agency***

- Although a unified agency could help to tackle the misalignment of curriculum and assessment, it should ideally be responsible for all phases of education to ensure a coherent and seamless learner journey. It is also critical that any such agency take a system-wide approach in recognition of the absolute interdependencies that exist between schools, the tertiary sector, and work.
- Institutional reform is often a demanding and laborious process and there is a real risk it will divert time, energy, and resource away from addressing more pressing concerns.
- We must also consider what we potentially stand to lose through institutional reform.

***Breadth of qualifications***

- Careers guidance is a key component in ensuring that senior pupils can make informed choices in what they study, particularly given the increasing complexity of the senior phase and indeed of the working world.

***Technology***

- Scotland is well-placed to be a major leader in the education technology ('edtech') sector with the appropriate funding and conditions.
- Post-COVID, the education system will undoubtedly continue to make heavy use of technological interventions and Scotland must make the appropriate investments to address digital and data poverty as well as ensuring equal access to computing, science, and technical subjects across Scotland.

**Section 3 Roles and Responsibilities*****Role of national agencies and other providers***

- CfE has suffered from unclear ownership since its inception.
- We would like to suggest that a structured, three-year plan be developed which clearly illustrates the responsibility of each agency and organisation and a line of accountability from the Ministerial down to practitioner level.

***Support for leadership and professional learning***

- Career-long professional learning (CLPL) is an indispensable tool in creating reflective practitioners who are able to design and deliver the curriculum to best effect.
- As specialists, it is important that teachers maintain a current knowledge of their subject and approaches to pedagogy.
- Professional learning will also be crucial in enhancing teachers' assessment literacy to enable future changes in approach to assessing qualifications.

***Stakeholder involvement in decision-making***

- The lack of consensus on the nature of the senior phase and of the qualification presentation pattern has been a major challenge for the implementation of CfE to date. Any major change in curriculum content, the balance between knowledge and skills, and qualifications approaches must be undertaken at a whole-system level and obtain buy-in from society as a whole.

## Section 4 Replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority and reforming Education Scotland

### *Education Scotland reform*

- When Education Scotland was created, there was considerable debate on the potential conflict between its inspection role and that of providing support and guidance to the sector. As a result, by some perspectives, the organisation in practice became compliance-driven rather than prioritising teacher needs and encouraging improvement.
- More fundamentally, there is a need to examine the place and purpose of inspection in 21st century schools.
- There needs to be clarity on the role that the support function of Education Scotland and others play in the provision of support for schools and teachers to enable teaching and learning.

### *SQA reform*

- The RSE Education Committee believes that, prior to embarking on institutional reform, it would have been preferable for Scottish Government to consider how to implement the broader comments of both the OECD report and the subsequent report *Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective on assessment* undertaken by Professor Gordon Stobart.
- Scottish society needs to start at the beginning by clearly delineating the learning outcomes its education system should be producing, particularly within the senior phase. This refers to the preferred balance between knowledge gain, skills development (including so-called '21st century skills'), and other markers of learning, as well as the interaction between them.

### *General comments on proposed institutional reforms*

- Any new curriculum and assessment agency must be broadly based – having responsibility for vocational as well as academic qualifications and meeting the needs of colleges and training providers as well as schools; technically competent; effective in its communication with centres; and work in close collaboration with those responsible for curriculum policy. It must have the appropriate level of independence to ensure the maintenance of assessment standards that are agreed.

## Comments and Questions

### Section 1 *Vision*

#### 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 or Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree]

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

- 1 It is important to note that Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) as envisioned in 2004 was met in general with acceptance across professional and political spheres. The crux of CfE's problems is rooted in its implementation – beginning in 2010 – and how this has diverged from what was originally conceived. For example, the 2004 model stressed continuity and progression, with no reference to the phases and levels which would eventually characterise the curriculum in practice. Further, although CfE contains many strong and innovative features like interdisciplinary learning, these have not always been afforded the focus they deserve, especially in secondary school.
- 2 Another significant shortcoming in CfE's implementation has been a lack of clarity and hence a lack of adherence to an overarching curriculum philosophy, inevitably leading to inconsistent interpretations and unclear priorities.
- 3 Concerns have been expressed with regard to variation in subject choice in the senior phase as well as the approach taken to qualification presentation across Scotland and the impact this might have had on equality of access.
- 4 The data which is often cited as a measure of CfE's success remains controversial. There are widely held perceptions that National 5 and Higher attainment rates are the key measure of school and learner attainment. This not only ignores the shift that has taken place in the curriculum and the presentation patterns in many schools but also fails to recognise other measures of achievement and the variety of qualifications at the same Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels.

## Comments and Questions

### Section 2 *Curriculum and Assessment*

#### 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 or Disagree/**Disagree**/Strongly Disagree]

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

- 5 As was stated previously, the 2004 model stressed continuity and progression, with no reference to the phases and levels that are currently in place. The lack of a seamless progression in learner pathways from Broad General Education (BGE) to senior phase qualifications, in whatever form these may emerge, seems to be the central and most important challenge to CfE as it is currently structured. Current practice has seen many curricular patterns not always well-articulated with other elements of the system. Further, the overall benefits to learners of these different approaches has never been properly evaluated, with SQA National Qualification results remaining as the default measure of success in the national discourse.

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

- 6 There is a need to ensure smooth progression and continuity across the whole of schooling and into tertiary education. At present, the learner journey is particularly stalled at the transition from BGE to the senior phase.
- 7 There is scope to consider how the early secondary years could be better utilised, particularly as a tool for managing the transition between BGE and the later senior years, with their increased pace of learning. The curriculum should unfold in a logical way, with smooth transitions between different stages and a stable rate of progression. Two field visits and analyses undertaken by SQA appeared to confirm a lack of pace in BGE and the desire by some to move the learning associated with National courses down to lower years.<sup>1,2</sup>

1 SQA. (2016). *Executive summary of initial SQA evaluation of new National Courses*. [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Executive\\_Summary\\_of\\_SQA\\_initial\\_evaluation\\_of\\_new\\_National\\_Courses.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Executive_Summary_of_SQA_initial_evaluation_of_new_National_Courses.pdf)

2 SQA. (2017). *National Course design and assessment – SQA fieldwork visits Year 2 (2016-17): Engagement and focus group discussions with centres delivering new National Qualifications*. [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/SQAFinalFieldworkReport\\_2016-17.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/SQAFinalFieldworkReport_2016-17.pdf)

- 8 Fundamentally, there is a need for a clear and universally supported definition of what is expected at the end of each stage of education in Scotland, with respect to the content of learning, level of attainment, and qualifications to be acquired, if any. As an example, the level of attainment pupils are to have reached within a subject area at the end of BGE prior to embarking on a National Course – and their subsequent success in that course – has not yet been fully investigated. National 5 courses were constructed on the premise that learners should have achieved curriculum level 4, including the development of the associated skills. However, Scottish Government data on attainment of curriculum levels at the end of BGE would suggest that not all learners entering a National 5 course have achieved this level.
- 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 or Disagree**/Disagree/Strongly Disagree]
- 3.2. Please share ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance this in future.**
- 9 The degree to which schools choose – or are indeed able – to make use of CfE’s flexibility is unclear, as are its impacts on the deployment of teaching staff and on timetabling. It is likely that smaller and less well-resourced schools have less capacity to deliver on the promised flexibility of the senior phase in particular, which undoubtedly has impacts on learner progression and on the narrowing of the attainment gap. The level of collaboration between schools and colleges, businesses, and other bodies is also largely unknown, though there is presumably less capacity for such collaboration in rural areas and in the wake of financial cutbacks which saw a decline in teachers and available resources across colleges and schools. It might be a good idea to map this activity if it is to become increasingly important through the ongoing reform of curriculum and assessment.
- 10 Collaboration between schools, colleges and universities has a major role to play in building curricular capacity. For example, access to college courses and facilities can provide a wider variety of learner pathways for the senior phase. Similarly, young people undertaking Advanced Higher and Scottish Baccalaureate project work have benefitted from working closely with university researchers.
- 11 Societal perception of the value of so-called ‘non-traditional pathways’ that do not lead to a university course will be essential in expanding the variety of courses that are available to and taken up by young people. Much of this support from higher and further education could be developed through greater promotion of community service learning (CSL) in which students themselves become contributors to change and support, also helping to challenge ‘ivory tower’ perceptions of higher education.
- 4.1. The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency will help to address the misalignment of curriculum and assessment.**
- The misalignment of curriculum and assessments is outlined in the OECD report *Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*.  
[Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree or Disagree/**Disagree**/Strongly Disagree]
- 4.2. Please share your views of the potential advantages of establishing such an Agency.**
- 12 Although a unified agency could help to tackle the misalignment of curriculum and assessment, it should ideally be responsible for all phases of education to ensure a coherent and seamless learner journey. It is also critical that any such agency take a system-wide approach in recognition of the absolute interdependencies that exist between schools, the tertiary sector, and work. Otherwise, existing problems of progression and continuity will only be transplanted elsewhere in the system rather than being resolved. Both structure and process changes will be required to achieve the goal of alignment.

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

- 13 Institutional reform is often a demanding and laborious process and there is a real risk it will divert time, energy, and resource away from addressing more pressing concerns. It could also create a void in the system as it will take time before any successor agency is up and running at full capacity.
- 14 We must also consider what we potentially stand to lose through institutional reform. This consultation on institutional reform is centred around CfE and predominantly on the progression from BGE into the senior phase qualifications, namely National Qualifications (National 4 & 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher). However, the portfolio of qualifications offered by SQA spans SCQF Levels 1 – 12 and includes internationally valued qualifications in many vocational fields as well as Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND) that can form the first two years of a university course.
- 15 This aspect of the role of SQA must be considered in this context.

#### 5.1. The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools.

Please visit the *SQA qualifications hub* to see the full breadth of existing SQA qualifications.  
[Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree or 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.

- 16 There are many good examples of school/college partnerships where young people have successfully completed courses outwith the traditional curriculum offering, including HNC, vocational, and Foundation Apprenticeships. These courses can provide a stepping stone to future vocational qualifications or allow entry into modern apprenticeships.

- 17 Many schools are also offering personal development courses and Skills for Work courses that allow young people to develop a wider range of skills.

- 18 Despite these successes, there remains a need for a better understanding by teachers, learners, and parents of the wider learning opportunities that can be pursued either within the school or through said school/college partnerships.

#### 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.

- 19 The predominant view among parents, teachers, and society in general is that Highers are the *de facto* metric of school and learner attainment in Scotland. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been in place for over 20 years and yet other qualifications at the same level (SCQF 6) are not yet regarded with the same parity of esteem. Foundation Apprenticeships at SCQF 6 have gone some way towards addressing this issue but there remains a challenge with how vocational and other qualifications are promoted and perceived.<sup>3</sup>
- 20 Education can take place outside of the traditional school setting including in the form of successful partnerships with colleges, community groups, industry, and others. These alternative learning pathways may suit some learners better than more traditional settings and are also likely to become increasingly important in addressing knowledge and skills gaps within the Scottish workforce.
- 21 Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) has been successful in expanding learning and career pathways in the senior phase, making it possible for more vocational courses, including apprenticeships, to be undertaken as well as increasing connections between schools, other education partners, and employers. It would be useful to consider to what extent schools are able to provide these opportunities.

3 Ponton A. (2021, September 9). Giving credit where credit is due: how the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Authority is keeping pace with Scottish education in the 21st century. *Royal Society of Edinburgh Tertiary Education Futures blog series*. <https://rse.org.uk/resources/resource/blog/giving-credit-where-credit-is-due/>

**22** Careers guidance is a key component in ensuring that senior pupils can make informed choices in what they study, particularly given the increasing complexity of the senior phase and indeed of the working world. It is vital that young people are supported in deriving maximum benefits from their talents and skills and are given a clear understanding of the benefits of different learning and career pathways, rather than being directed towards destinations that may not suit them.

**23** This shift will take time as learners, teachers, parents, and society in general adapt to new ways of conceptualising ‘success.’ However, the cohort of pupils choosing more vocationally- or work-based experiences (such as through modern apprenticeships) appears to have grown in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

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

[Strongly Agree/Agree/**Neither Agree or 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.**

**24** Technology can be used to craft meaningful educational experiences rather than only serving as a delivery tool. This could include specialised games and immersive or virtual reality experiences. Scotland is well-placed to be a major leader in the education technology (‘edtech’) sector with the appropriate funding and conditions. Industry can have a key role to play in embedding these technologies within schools and co-developing effective solutions to remote learning challenges.

**25** Post-COVID, the education system will undoubtedly continue to make heavy use of technological interventions and Scotland must make the appropriate investments to address digital and data poverty as well as ensuring equal access to computing, science, and technical subjects across Scotland. Teachers should also be offered appropriate training and development opportunities to increase their confidence in employing different technologies.

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

**26** The curriculum is a body of knowledge that is – or should be – constantly developing and changing in response to new research and new ideas across curriculum areas. Knowledge involves making sense of information. By some estimates, while human knowledge doubled approximately every century until the end of the 19th century, it doubled about every 25 years through most of the 20th century, and, as of 2013 – in the ‘information age’ – it is doubling every 13 months on average, and faster in some fields. Knowledge is now outpacing our ability to make sense of it. The careers for which we are trying to prepare young learners may change radically – or may perhaps not exist – a decade hence. In this scenario, what is to count as important knowledge? How – and by whom – will that be determined?

**27** Knowing how to learn and motivating learners to want to learn is becoming as important as – and arguably more important than – what they learn. Students need to learn how to process, evaluate, and use information, identifying useful and relevant knowledge and information to solve problems and understand concepts. A rethink about knowledge, understanding, skills, and the purposes and structure of the curriculum, especially in the senior phase, is needed.

## Comments and Questions

### Section 3 Roles and Responsibilities

**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 or 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.**

**28** The RSE Education Committee has not provided an answer to this question.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government. (2019, December 19). *Developing the young workforce; fifth annual progress report 2018-2019*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/developing-young-workforce-fifth-annual-progress-report-2018-19/pages/7/>

**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 or Disagree/**Disagree**/Strongly Disagree]

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

**29** The RSE Education Committee has not provided an answer to this question.

**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.**

**30** It would be useful to know how schools and teachers regard new support mechanisms such as Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) and the extent to which engagement has taken place. In general, national or regional hubs and expertise-pooling is surely a good thing in order to avoid duplication of effort and disseminate best practice.

**31** CfE has suffered from unclear ownership since its inception. Increasingly, there is a tension between powers exercised at a national level and by local authorities, who by statute are responsible for the management and delivery of education but whose role has become increasingly ambiguous in practice.

**32** We would like to suggest that a structured, three-year plan be developed which clearly illustrates the responsibility of each agency and organisation and a line of accountability from the Ministerial down to practitioner level.

**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 or Disagree**/Disagree/Strongly Disagree]

**33** Career-long professional learning (CLPL) is an indispensable tool in creating reflective practitioners who are able to design and deliver the curriculum to best effect. Indeed, CfE was

originally seen as a way of empowering teachers by affording them greater independence to exercise professional judgment.

**34** However, this empowerment was not always coupled with the guidance and professional development required for teachers to take full advantage of it. Furthermore, the extent of local authority direction, support, and oversight has varied greatly. The challenges of yet further reform are large and will require time, training, and support for an already overworked teaching and teacher-education profession.

**35** As specialists, it is important that teachers maintain a current knowledge of their subject and approaches to pedagogy. The curriculum should evolve over time and teachers must be supported in continuing to increase their subject knowledge. This is particularly important in STEM subjects. Close connections with university academics have been crucial in engaging teachers with recent developments.

**36** Professional learning will also be crucial in enhancing teachers' assessment literacy to enable future changes in approach to assessing qualifications. This should take place both within the context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) but also within CLPL. The 2020 alternative assessment model highlighted the value of teachers receiving greater support in making professional judgments of learner performance.

**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 or Disagree**/Disagree/Strongly Disagree]

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

**37** The voices of stakeholders to inform decision making are vital for further development of the curriculum, especially the revision of senior phase qualifications, which have remained fundamentally subject-based.

**38** The Stobart Report calls for the voices of teachers, pupils, and parents to be heard if lasting and credible change is to be achieved. For example, a recent Education Scotland thought paper on *Learner Pathways*<sup>5</sup>, created following a series of consultant-led workshops involving 30-40 senior teachers and educators, delivered a radical critique of our current subject-dominated qualifications and its lack of equity and interdisciplinarity. It questions the purposes of the current high-stakes national qualifications and offers a vision for the reform of the curriculum to meet the needs of learners in the 21st century that recognises (*inter alia*) the important role of collaboration with external partners including business, industry, universities, and colleges.

**39** The lack of consensus on the nature of the senior phase and of the qualification presentation pattern has been a major challenge for the implementation of CfE to date. Any major change in curriculum content, the balance between knowledge and skills, and qualifications approaches must be undertaken at a whole-system level and obtain buy-in from society as a whole.

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

[Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree or Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree]

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

**40** The RSE Education Committee has not provided an answer to this question.

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

**41** The RSE Education Committee has not provided an answer to this question.

## Comments and Questions

### Section 4 Replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority and reforming 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.**

**42** When Education Scotland was created, there was considerable debate on the potential conflict between its inspection role and that of providing support and guidance to the sector. As a result, by some perspectives, the organisation in practice became compliance-driven rather than prioritising teacher needs and encouraging improvement. There would therefore be benefit to separating the inspection and support functions and for inspection to be carried out by an independent body that reports to Scottish Parliament rather than Scottish Government to help avoid a conflict of interest. It bears mentioning that the sensitivities surrounding the housing of inspection and policy-making functions within the same body were raised and addressed in the past; however, this separation was not particularly long-lasting as the inspectorate role was eventually combined with Learning and Teaching Scotland to become Education Scotland less than ten years after the initial separation.<sup>6,7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Education Scotland. (2020). *Learner Pathways: A key to successful curriculum design*. <https://education.gov.scot/media/10dd4xe2/curriculum-learner-pathways-thought-paper.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ozga, J. & Lawn, M. (2014). Inspectorates and Politics: the trajectories of school inspection in England and Scotland. *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 186(186), 11-21. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfp.4388>

<sup>7</sup> Raffe, D., Howieson, C., & Tinklin, T. (2010). The Scottish educational crisis of 2000: an analysis of the policy process of unification. *JOURNAL OF EDUCATION POLICY*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930110116516>

- 43** More fundamentally, there is a need to examine the place and purpose of inspection in 21st century schools. While it can deliver positives such as a measure of quality assurance if conducted with sufficient regularity, it can also stifle beneficial innovation and undermine teacher agency if taken too far.
- 44** Inspection should also be as much about the performance of policies themselves as it is about the bodies and individuals tasked with delivering them. Indeed, one of the criticisms of CfE's implementation has been that it was never properly evaluated. It will be important to agree success criteria and capture appropriate longitudinal data in order to monitor progress. Such inspection provides a necessary channel of feedback to determine if policies are having the desired effect or whether any adverse unintended consequences have materialised, helping to identify where change is needed.
- 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.**
- 45** There needs to be clarity on the role that the support function of Education Scotland and others play in the provision of support for schools and teachers to enable teaching and learning. This must not only reflect upon who does what but also what level of support and what materials should be available and what should be generated by individual schools and teachers to personalise learning.
- 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**
- 46** The RSE Education Committee believes that, prior to embarking on institutional reform, it would have been preferable for Scottish Government to consider how to implement the broader comments of both the OECD report and the subsequent report *Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective on assessment* undertaken by Professor Gordon Stobart. Without this, any institutional reform will likely be impaired by other challenges within the system that are outwith the remit of any one agency, and instead require a more fundamental culture change within Scottish education to address.

- 47 There is an argument for a review of the nature and purpose of education in the 21st century, as has been highlighted by both the Education Scotland study cited earlier and work undertaken by Skills Development Scotland.<sup>8</sup> Clarity and consensus is also needed on the measures that should be used to monitor the success of that system, moving beyond the traditional qualifications metric.
- 48 Although the present review does include questions about wider issues such as the nature of CfE and progression, we hope these become the subject of a review in their own right, informed by the preliminary research that is gathered at this initial stage.
- 49 While there is overall support for CfE, there remains no overall consensus on some key aspects of its implementation. This diversity of opinion exists not only in the political realm but also across society in general, parents, and in educational institutions. Scottish society needs to start at the beginning by clearly delineating the learning outcomes its education system should be producing, particularly within the senior phase. This refers to the preferred balance between knowledge gain, skills development (including so-called ‘21st century skills’), and other markers of learning, as well as the interaction between them. The role of knowledge in particular has gone unresolved since CfE’s introduction, as pointed out by the OECD review.
- 50 Radical changes require a whole-systems approach to be successful; however, this kind of joined-up thinking has been often lacking in education policy development. For example, while recognising the time constraints that have necessarily limited the remit of the present review, we would hope that any future stages in the reform agenda take account of the interface between the tertiary and school systems. The tertiary education system (in Scotland and beyond) will need to respond and adapt to a changing Scottish qualifications system in order to ensure that a smooth transition exists for young people. Engagement with universities and colleges at an early stage will be essential.
- 51 Educational priorities (e.g. what pupils are expected to learn) and processes (e.g. assessment models) are heavily influenced by societal values. For example, if society regards traditional qualifications (Nationals, Highers, etc.) as the sole currency of attainment, it will be difficult to enact potentially beneficial changes in qualifications – and indeed, in teaching and learning. Education has also become heavily focused on destinations, with the end of the pipeline effectively dictating everything that comes before it.
17. **Please share any comments or suggestions you have on this proposed reform below.**  
**We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:**
- the approach this reform should take (for example are there alternative models for this reform?)**
  - the opportunities these reforms could present (for example what should the role of the new agency be?)**
  - the risks associated with any reform**
  - how any risks might be mitigated**
  - the timescales over which these reforms should take place**
- 52 Any new curriculum and assessment agency must be broadly based – having responsibility for vocational as well as academic qualifications and meeting the needs of colleges and training providers as well as schools; technically competent; effective in its communication with centres; and work in close collaboration with those responsible for curriculum policy. It must have the appropriate level of independence to ensure the maintenance of assessment standards that are agreed. It should also ensure it does not further confuse the delegation of responsibilities for Scottish education.
- 53 Any such agency must encompass an approach to life-long learning and include progression pathways through academic and vocational subjects that enable learners to transition into and between roles during their careers.

<sup>8</sup> Skills Development Scotland. (2018, February). *Skills 4.0: A skills model to drive Scotland’s future*. [https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44684/skills-40\\_a-skills-model.pdf](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44684/skills-40_a-skills-model.pdf)

### ***Additional Information***

Any enquiries about this advice paper should be addressed to Daria Tuhtar (dtuhtar@therse.org.uk).

Responses are published on the RSE website (<https://www.rse.org.uk/>)

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

*Advice Paper (Royal Society of Edinburgh) ISSN 2024-2694*