



Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority Consultation: Response by Solace Scotland

26 November 2021

Introduction

Solace Scotland is the Scottish Branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (UK). Solace welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Reform consultation and thanks Professor Muir and the Expert Group for their engagement with Solace.

Solace supports the ADES response to the Education Reform consultation and would like to highlight the following key messages:

- Solace agree with Professor Stobart on the importance of involving pupils in any reform of the examination system, because "the people most affected by assessments and examinations are students – they're the ones who take them, they're the ones who are shaped by them, the ones who form their identity around what happens in assessment systems."
- Partnership working is essential. Building trust around any new arrangements is a critical issue and recognising the importance of school staff and local authorities' statutory duties when making decisions would be a symbol of such partnership and would enable richer and coherent 'place-based' decision making.
- The existing vision of CfE should be revisited to reflect the significant educational and societal changes which have taken place since CfE was first launched.
- Solace agree with OECD that the education system in Scotland is not fragmented. However, identified system coherence and alignment issues would benefit from further review. This stance is also reflected in the commissioned Stobart Report on the Senior Phase.
- Solace supports the development of a more inclusive model of qualifications as evidenced internationally, for example the International Baccalaureate which has the potential to allow young people to build up a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate achievements across a wide range of skills and knowledge rather than the exam led system which is currently in place.
- Solace agree that significant improvements can be made e.g. simplification of curricular descriptors based on national benchmarks; removal of Experiences and Outcomes; greater alignment to skills for life, learning and work.
- Solace supports the separation of the regulatory status of SQA for qualifications from the role it has in delivering such qualifications.

- Although there may also be longer term benefits in having an agency for Curriculum and Assessment, these will only be seen after the complicated restructuring arrangements for Education Scotland and SQA as they are currently constituted as complete – this is likely to be several years and will inhibit the short term impacts of these organisations to process meaningful change.
- If a new Inspection Agency is to be created then it should be genuinely independent. There are good examples which were in place pre-2000 which could be examined. However, this may not lead to a ‘self-improving system’. The Higher Education system employs a ‘peer review’ approach and Solace would welcome the adoption of this methodology. Solace supports the establishment of an independent Inspectorate for Education. There may also be scope to extend this further to include a holistic approach to inspecting schools and their communities. There is also an opportunity to move away from grade related inspection processes through the adoption of a more formative and supportive framework for schools that promotes the concept of teacher agency.
- The flaws which OECD found in the Scottish system have been exacerbated by the erosion of local government core funding and addressing this would help significantly in any planned change programme.
- Solace welcome the involvement of Academic colleagues in shaping curriculum design and would support a stronger partnership role between national and local government in helping to shape the future direction of Scottish Education.

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response.

Please indicate your publishing preference:

- **Publish response with name**
- Publish response only (without name)
- Do not publish response

We may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

- **Yes**
- No

Detailed Response

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 vision¹². 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)

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?

Humes (2013); and Priestly (2018a) argue *that CfE was first set out as a broad statement of principles, subsequently developed and elaborated in the years that followed. The curriculum manifests many of the common goals (school improvement; equity; a future focus; and coherence) and emphases (competencies; values; pedagogy; student agency; partnerships; and reduced prescription) identified by Sinnema and Aitken (2013) in their analysis of international curricular commonalities. Humes and Priestly (2021), in their examination of CfE’s key features, highlight that it CfE includes an increased emphasis on generic skills at the expense of the specification of propositional knowledge; so-called ‘progressive’ and active pedagogy, placing the learner centre-stage; a description of the learning process in terms of “experiences” and “outcomes”, set out in a framework of linear levels; an aspiration that teachers would become curriculum developers and change agents; and above all, a desire to promote four generic “capacities” (successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens).*

Solace agree with Humes and Priestly (2021) that there were discontinuities between the intention of CfE and its subsequent enactment. Solace also propose that, although there was support for the vision of curriculum for excellence, there is still debate over whether CfE is actually a curriculum. In addition, it is our view that the instructionist approach taken to implementation, rather than a constructivist approach, may have prevented CfE from

being fully understood or implemented in full. This can be evidenced in the weight of national documentation which was issued at the outset, together with the approach adopted by the HMIE in their evaluation of quality indicator 5.1 The Curriculum which added further to the confusion within the system. This also chimes with Priestly who reminds us that *CfE remains in many schools, in the words of the OECD's Andreas Schleicher, an intended rather than an implemented curriculum, and there remains much work to be done to fully enact its principles.*

The separation of curriculum from learning, teaching and assessment was not intentional, however, it is essential that any further curriculum reform takes a holistic approach enabling learning, teaching and assessment approaches to fully meet the needs of each individual learner.

Although generally inclusive, especially supported by the two other pillars of DYW and GIRFEC, the nature of the existing examination phases makes it challenging for those with additional support needs to gain certification for the skills they have acquired and the policy landscape has become increasingly cluttered over time which has distracted focus on the three core pillars of CfE, DYW and GIRFEC. This cluttered landscape makes it challenging for practitioners to implement a curriculum which reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland. This is also reflected by Priestly and Drew (2017) who propose that a *shifting policy discourse (excellence, equity, collaboration, empowerment, attainment, leadership) and the persistence of tensions resulting from accountability mechanisms have made the enactment of CfE challenging for many teachers. Especially in the early stages, there was limited opportunity to engage in "sense making" and "capacity building" which are essential requirements of successful reforms.*

SECTION 2 - CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

The OECD reports *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future* and *Upper-Secondary Education Student Assessment in Scotland: A Comparative Perspective* 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.

CfE has the potential to provide a framework for coherent progression, however the complicated landscape of changing guidance has created a challenging environment for practitioners to navigate through. Greater trust and professional autonomy would help practitioners adopt a constructivist approach if they are empowered to adopt a 'one size fits one approach by adopting highly individualised learner journeys.

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

Solace agree with Priestly and Humes (2021) who outline that *the development of new qualifications has profoundly shaped the subsequent development of CfE. Arguably, they have come to define CfE in secondary schools, with a corresponding neglect of the Broad General Education phase in school years S1-3..... Criticisms that this trend is narrowing the curriculum are countered by assertions that the new qualifications were intended to engender flexibility of provision, with students able to choose a portfolio of qualifications at different levels over the full 3 years of the senior phase (from S4 to S6). In practice, however, many schools lack the resources to offer such flexibility. Additionally, many schools continue to see transitions across the SCQF levels in terms of a ladder of progression.*

Solace believe that individualised learner journeys are key to progression. The concept of the Learner Journey has been somewhat lost from the ambition outlined in the early CfE paperwork. The focus of the HMIE on core quality indicators, the national improvement framework, LGBF benchmarking, etc has driven a quantitative approach rather than a qualitative approach. Any future curriculum review should ensure that the curriculum is viewed through the lens of a learner's journey which allows progression from birth through to employment and beyond. This would involve taking a closer look at skills progression in its widest sense. There is support for this position from the International Council of Education Advisors (ICEA) in their interim report (2017) which recommends *improving pedagogy for specific subjects, unleashing untapped potential within the system and ensuring a culture of collaboration.* Their final 2018 report reinforced the centrality of CfE describing it as *"the cornerstone of educational transformation in Scotland"* (ICEA, 2018, para. 6) and emphasising the need to retain its *"vision and holistic approach"* (ibid, para. 13).

The report endorsed the shift from *"coverage of defined subjects or areas"* (ibid, para. 21) to a pedagogical approach which *"sought to describe what young people should become as a result of their learning"* (ibid, para. 21).



It is the view of Solace that the Senior Phase cannot be seen as a separate entity and therefore we have significant concern if the national qualifications are reviewed in isolation. Learning, by its very nature, is holistic and the full learner journey requires more attention if we are to address the current issues of transition.

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*

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

Structure doesn't necessarily assist empowered communities, relationships do. Therefore to enable learning communities to fully implement CfE, the system requires significant decluttering to allow professionals to fully assess the needs of their learners and respond to those needs using a coherent 'place-based' approach. Trust in local professionals requires further enhancement together with a wider lens in order to appreciate the complex community factors at play, particularly those communities most impacted by poverty. Our children and young people are constantly learning, whether during school hours or after hours, and therefore the profile of wider achievements, volunteering and other out-of-school activities need to be taken into account if we are to truly embrace the four capacities.

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 report¹⁵.

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

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

Solace propose that it is essential to clarify the purpose of any proposed agency before the potential advantages can be assessed. It is the view of Solace that any proposed Agency would need to take a holistic approach rather than the 'silo- based' approach which has been adopted traditionally.

Any proposed Agency would also require a deep understanding of the curriculum at the Macro, Meso and Micro level and Solace would seek further advice from the International Council of Educational Advisors (ICEA) in this regard.

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

It is essential that assessment does not drive learning. The creation of a new agency covering both curriculum and assessment could provide opportunity to develop a fresh dialogue about the future of national qualifications and to bring these in line with 21st Century skills including data and green technologies. Solace believe that the voices of children and young people, parent/carers, practitioners and businesses should be at the heart of any future curriculum review.

A truly collaborative approach would be welcomed with clear roles and responsibilities defined.

The balance of curriculum and assessment will need to be carefully managed, aligned and implemented. As ADES have stated, the curriculum experience and assessment purposes at each stage of a learner's journey must have parity of importance and resource. Any changes proposed should ensure that the needs of the learner are at the heart of the design.

Solace agree with Professor Stobart on the importance of involving pupils in any reform of the examination system, because "the people most affected by assessments and examinations are students – they're the ones who take them, they're the ones who are shaped by them, the ones who form their identity around what happens in assessment systems.

Any proposed Agency should learn important lessons from the past including a deep understanding of the gap between intention and enactment. This is well illustrated by Walter and Humes (2021) who found that *initial support for the broad principles of CfE (including the four capacities) was gradually overtaken by frustration about the perceived lack of clarity in some of the key concepts (such as interdisciplinary learning), by anxiety*

about the delay in announcing changes in assessment to accompany the new curriculum, and by uncertainty about their role as “empowered” curriculum developers within a transformed culture.

5.1 The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications 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.

A wide and varied programme of qualifications is in place, however these do not reflect the breadth of 21st century skills that our children and young people will require for the future, nor does it reflect the needs of children with severe and complex needs.

As stated in 2.3, Solace agree with Priestly and Humes (2021) who outline that the development of new qualifications has profoundly shaped the subsequent development of CfE. Arguably, they have come to define CfE in secondary schools, with a corresponding neglect of the Broad General Education phase in school years S1-3.....Criticisms that this trend is narrowing the curriculum are countered by assertions that the new qualifications were intended to engender flexibility of provision, with students able to choose a portfolio of qualifications at different levels over the full 3 years of the senior phase (from S4 to S6). In practice, however, many schools lack the resources to offer such flexibility. Additionally, many schools continue to see transitions across the SCQF levels in terms of a ladder of progression.

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.

In the 21st Century it is a paradox that traditional qualifications remain. In the senior phase in particular, due to limited resources, some young people may have to fit their learning into columns rather than being built around their aspirations and goals which can have a negative impact on motivation. For this reason we would welcome closer examination of the International Baccalaureate system which allows young people to evidence the breadth of their learning through a mix of portfolio and qualifications. This also chimes with Stobart who suggests that *Scotland’s approaches, with their social grounding in the British (Victorian) tradition of the high-stakes exams and multiple tiers/exit points are out*



of step with the rest of the world in many respects, and implies that Scotland could learn much from the comparative OECD study.

A return to the three core pillars of CfE, DYW and GIRFEC holds the key to how we enhance the role of a wider variety of qualifications. Together with a future skills analysis this would enable practitioners and academics to shape a curriculum and qualifications fit for a post pandemic era. Solace would welcome a return to evidence-based policy making and would welcome greater involvement of our excellent academics.

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.

All organisations have experienced a technological step change with regards digital solutions and the periods of remote learning is an example of how quickly the system transformed to meet the needs of children and young people who were learning remotely.

A number of local authorities have been at the forefront of this work, having invested in devices and infrastructure. Local authorities who are linked to major City Deal projects have invested in data driven innovation which aim to create data citizens of the future thus blurring the transition points between schools, further and higher education, research and employment. This may hold the key to delivering learning opportunities which are fit for purpose in the 21st century.

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*¹⁷ 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.

Solace support the Cosla and ADES' view that, as a member of the Curriculum and Assessment Board, it would benefit from review, ensuring it has a more coherence strategic focus on the future direction. In line with the observations from the OECD we believe that there is the opportunity for an inclusive, regular review process to be established.

Solace also support a greater role for teacher ownership and agency in the development and review of the curriculum together with our educational research colleagues based in the university sector.

In addition, we agree with Professor Stobart on the importance of involving pupils in any reform of the examination system, because "the people most affected by assessments and examinations are students – they're the ones who take them, they're the ones who are shaped by them, the ones who form their identity around what happens in assessment systems.

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.

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.

Support from national agencies is not consistent and often offers of support do not reflect the needs of schools and local authorities and the specific communities they serve, instead support tends to be 'one-size fits all' rather than 'one-size fits one'.

Clarity offer and how this can be accessed is key. The impact of the many Education Scotland staff involved in the RICs is unclear and therefore an assessment of how effective this approach is would welcome given the size of resource which is currently assigned to this work which may be best devolved to community or school 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/Disagree
Disagree

Strongly Disagree

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

Solace supports ADES in their view that this should draw on the good practice in peer support currently delivered through ADES and the GTCS. The strong framework provided by the GTCs and the Professional update process is viewed favourably. The RICs who are offering professional learning opportunities are reporting that these are evaluated well by those participating.

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.

Partnership working is essential. Building trust around any new arrangements is a critical issue and recognising the importance of school staff and local authorities' statutory duties when making decisions would be a symbol of such partnership and would enable richer 'place-based' decision making.

Of even greater importance is the role of children and young people and Solace agree with Stobart on the importance of involving pupils in any reform of the examination system, because "the people most affected by assessments and examinations are students – they're the ones who take them, they're the ones who are shaped by them, the ones who form their identity around what happens in assessment systems.

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.

We believe that independent inspection has an important role in strengthening education in Scotland. We recognise that inspection can play an important role in providing public confidence and determining and sharing best practice, and that having this role being clearly defined as independent will ensure greater trust and buy-in from all stakeholders.

We do note however that we are not convinced that you can 'inspect' improvement into any system, particularly in education which is fundamentally relational. Collective, peer-led approaches to driving improvement, including but not limited to the 'Collaborate for Improvement' approach that has been piloted recently, alongside well-resourced quality improvement support have a key role to play and would help to create a 'self-improving system'.

Care should be taken in order to prevent any new system being derived by algorithm which is designed to validate the National Improvement Framework. Education is more complex and therefore Solace would support a holistic 'Place-Based' model of Inspection which supports the principles of Christie.

Lastly we would highlight that reforms to inspection in Scotland should address the situation in early learning and childcare which is currently scrutinised by both Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. With the successful delivery of the 1140 Hours expansion, and further expansions to childcare planned by the Scottish Government, it important that the system for ELC settings is simplified.

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

Over the past decade we have seen a consistent or increased level of resource provided to national education bodies, whilst at the same time as Local Government have faced serious financial constrains requiring councils face difficult decisions in how they support improvement within education. This review is an opportunity to review the balance of resources to support education, and which functions can be delivered nationally or better supported locally. We believe that the presumption should be resources should be channelled as locally as possible, with clear justification for any functions which remain national.

Roles and responsibilities across Scotland's education system can, at times, be blurred. It is important that through this process we gain clarity, on where responsibility lies including the role of the new Scottish Education Council.

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 Education¹⁸ and in respect of the Senior Phase¹⁹, 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.

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.

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)

Solace agree with ADES that if a new Inspection Agency is to be created then it should be genuinely independent. There are good examples which were in place pre-2000 which could be examined. However, this may not lead to a 'self-improving system'. The Higher Education system employs a 'peer review' approach and Solace would welcome the adoption of this methodology.

b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example the development of a new national approach to inspection including alignment with other scrutiny functions)

Continuous improvement and the concept of a self-improving system should also be considered. There is also an urgent need to align inspection bodies e.g. the Care Inspectorate, Audit Scotland, etc to ensure coherence of standards and expectations. The word scrutiny needs to be dropped in favour of inspection.

c) the risks associated with any reform (for example whether the independence of the inspectorate could be jeopardised by change)

Solace agree with ADES that the risks are very likely outweighed by the benefits arising from increased credibility and consistency. HM Inspectors will require an evidence-based approach and agenda for change should be based on inspection evidence and a collective knowledge of the strengths and challenges across the system.

d) how any risks might be mitigated

The risks might be mitigated by building in external evaluation of progress with an independent inspectorate as a separate body from Education Scotland. This could be led by a university research team or an inspectorate from another part of the UK.

e) the timescales over which these reforms should take place.

A clear timeline is critical. The location of inspection functions alongside national-level improvement support and providing policy advice to Scottish Government has resulted in a

lack of clarity in the scrutiny functions at present. Solace also feel that there is a strong argument for a separate Learning and Teaching agency similar to what was in place previously in the form of LTS.

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)

Education Scotland lacks a clear identity. The contribution it makes to the education system nationally is not sufficient. It would be expected that it would drive curricular innovation but that has not happened. Education Scotland had the opportunity to learn from effective practice gathered through inspection, but there is limited evidence this has happened. Therefore the impact of Education Scotland on improving the system of education is difficult to quantify Without a serious review of the structure, purpose and leadership model of Education Scotland it is difficult to assess scope for improvement. Placing additional functions within an organisation that has had limited impact would be problematic. Bringing together HMIE and Learning Teaching Scotland did not produce the benefits that were intended by Ministers who made the decision in 2011. It is important that time is taken to understand why the organisation has not delivered what it intended to do in order to avoid making similar mistakes with any new, or restructured, Agency.

b) the opportunities reform could present (for example should more prominence be given to aspects of Education Scotland's role)

Unless the organisation has a clear identity and purpose which is shared by the entire system, it is unclear which aspects require greater prominence. The

organisation needs to be much clearer on what role it serves within the Scottish education system and how this is a viable alternative to the creation of a 'self-improving system' or a peer-led review approach.

c) the risks associated with any reform (for example disruption of service to education establishments and settings)

Given that Education Scotland has not made a significant contribution over nearly two years of the pandemic, it is difficult to quantify the difference it would make in terms of 'disruption' during reform.

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)

The reform should embrace a much more holistic approach to the developmental needs of children and young people and should be extended well beyond the school curriculum. The learning and development needs of children and young people need to be more

connected and coherent which involves a broad range of partners as part of a Scottish Education System.

Solace support the principles outlined in the Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services and would welcome:

- Reforms which aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.
- Public service providers working much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.
- Prioritisation of expenditure on public services which prevent negative outcomes from arising e.g. the creation of a wellbeing economy.
- Whole system approaches which are 'Place-based'.

b) the opportunities these reforms could present (for example should more prominence be given to an aspect of SQA's role)

There is much scope to simplify the current system to create joined up learning, teaching and assessment approaches as evidenced in the International Baccalaureate model.

c) the risks associated with any reform (for example loss of income, confusion as to system of awards in Scotland)

The system should be co-produced with the voices of children and young people at the heart of decision-making.

Any proposed changes should be carefully planned and complete before implementation. The previous review of national qualifications saw the qualifications being created at the same time as being implemented which put undue pressure on both young people, practitioners and parents/carers. Therefore it is essential that we learn lessons and avoid the making the same error. Curriculum-making and qualification design is complex and therefore care should be taken to deeply understand the macro, meso and micro levels.

Given that each Local Authority is subject to charges made by SQA. Solace will seek assurance that any future payments to the SQA successor organisation(s) are transparent, robust and represent Best Value and that any proposed changes to existing structures and delivery models should not result in any new recurring financial burdens for the Council. In this respect it is expected the Scottish Government fully fund the expansion of delivery models. There is likely to be initial set up costs linked to the disbandment of existing structures and creation of the new organisations. These costs are likely to include redundancy and pension liabilities, consultants and project management, and Scottish Government staffing and other resourcing. It is essential that these costs are incorporated into an effective Business Planning process and supported by clearly identified funding.

It may be appropriate to build in clear separation of the strategic direction set by ministers, and the oversight of the overall plan for Curriculum for Excellence for the longer term, perhaps on a three year cycle of improvement. This should be overseen through the creation of transparent joint governance arrangements.

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.

The importance of pedagogy cannot be underestimated. Learning, Teaching Scotland (LTS) played an important support role for practitioners and Solace would support the creation of an agency similar to this.

Solace are not convinced that the establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment agency will fix the issues in the current system and would need to be convinced that assessment wouldn't wag the tail of the curriculum.

Solace support the statutory duty of the Education Authority remaining with Local Authorities who we believe are best placed to improve standards in schools by taking a coherent place-based approach where children and young people can thrive and exceed their potential.