



Education Reform

Introduction

Scottish education will achieve better outcomes for our children and young people, especially those who rely most heavily on public services, when all parts of the system work together effectively. This paper sets out the ADES position on *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Vision for Scottish Education*¹ and the Scottish Government response.² The intention of the paper is to assist the government in taking forward the ambitious plans for education reform. ADES members across Scotland were actively involved in the compilation of this paper and shared their views through the Directors' Forum, ADES networks and online seminars. ADES welcomes the recommendations for change and the opportunity to engage in the development of a refreshed vision for Scottish education.

In summary, the *Putting Learners at the Centre* report proposed the following:

- There should be a new agency for qualifications, a new education agency and an independent inspectorate.
- The new education agency should include SQA's Accreditation/Regulation Directorate and the Community Learning and Development Standards Council.
- The Registrar for Independent Schools should return to the Learning Directorate and link directly with GTCS.
- The staff in Education Scotland who are HM Inspectors or support the inspection functions of Education Scotland should move to an independent inspectorate.
- The new education agency should create and sustain a forum for ongoing and proactive discussion about curriculum, learning and teaching

For ease of reference this paper sets out the ADES view on the recommendations from Professor Muir's Report and provides additional commentary on the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and National Improvement Framework (NIF). The key sections are:

- Wider Implications
- Renewed Vision
- New National Agency
- Inspection
- Qualifications and Assessment

¹ Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Vision for Scottish Education (9 March 2022) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/documents/>

² Putting learners at the centre: response to the independent advisor on education reform's report (9 March 2022) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-at-the-centre-response-to-the-independent-advisor-on-education-reforms-report/>

Section 1

Wider implications

Beyond schools

Although the emphasis in *Putting Learners at the Centre* was on school education, in particular mainstream schools, it is vital that we do not lose sight of the fact that the work of local authorities extends well beyond the delivery of statutory education. Local authorities hold the legislative responsibility for continuous improvement, raising standards and reducing the impact of poverty on children's education through the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000) and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 but learning begins well before the start of formal schooling. The vital role of families and communities in supporting children and young people must be placed firmly at the centre of government policy. All parents and carers have a fundamental role to play in ensuring that children and young people are in a place of 'readiness to learn' if we are to achieve the ambition of closing the gaps in outcomes arising from relative poverty. Addressing socio-economic disadvantage must be viewed as a priority across all government departments and council services. ADES is committed to working with government officials, partner agencies, council departments and the third sector organisations who support families. The expectation that a period of formal education will be sufficient to improve life chances does not reflect the adverse circumstances and poverty levels experienced by children and young people or recognise the gaps in literacy and numeracy skills that may already exist well before they start school.

Agency roles and clarity of purpose

The ADES view is that we should all be mindful of the statement that:

'The challenge of central government is to balance necessary consistency of purpose with local energy, innovation and ownership. The roles of national and local government and of intermediate agencies need to be clearly understood with an emphasis on inclusiveness, responsiveness, agility, and collaboration within a framework of common purpose. The principle of subsidiarity whereby local agency is valued and protected should be part of such a longer-term approach to governance.' ICEA report December 2020

ADES believes that the principle of subsidiarity when applied in the correct context can be a powerful agent of change. However, there is a need to ensure clarity of meaning and purpose to achieve success. Recent OECD reports have stressed the importance of streamlining to reduce bureaucracy. It is clear that the existing reform landscape is already overly complex with the potential for layers of bureaucracy. Examples include OECD reports, ICEA reports, the NIF Review, *Putting Learners at the Centre* and the review of qualifications. Addressing the recommendations on a report-by-report basis undermines the OECD call for a systematic approach to curriculum review and a structured long-term approach to implementation to reflect the existing strengths within the system. The national discussion will offer additional insights into the views of parents, carers, pupils and wider stakeholders. This will provide an opportunity to revisit, prioritise and streamline the existing raft of recommendations.

Section 2 Renewed Vision

The ADES view is that the time is right to refresh the vision for education. The current vision was established as part of the development of a Curriculum for Excellence and there is an opportunity to revisit it to reflect today's society. To be effective, it must look to the future and beyond the here and now. It must promote lifelong learning and a recognition that the future for our children and young people is unknown and uncertain. A vision must be more than a strapline or mission statement – it has to be a live vision which sets out the purpose of education and drives change. To be meaningful, a refreshed vision must be inclusive and reflect the holistic role played by education in meeting the needs of all children and young people. The vision needs to be crisp, clear and linked to the moral purpose of education. It also needs to be compelling, memorable and accessible to those not immersed in education.

The key points arising from the ADES discussions on a refreshed vision are:

- In the existing political landscape, the reference to 'excellence and equity' describes a problem rather than a purpose. Reference to 'Excellence and equity' does not explicitly include children and young people with additional support needs. Equity is interpreted as the 'poverty-related attainment gap'. Children with additional support needs deserve better.
- A number of different 'visions' currently exist which adds complexity to the debate and leads to visions becoming just words rather than being purposeful. We need something different and better.
- The rationale for current initiatives must be embedded within the vision. This should include The Promise; Article 29 from the UNCRC; Sustainable Development Goals; the Logan review on a digital eco-system in Scotland; and our Carbon Neutral aspiration.

Section 3

New National Agency

ADES agrees that a new agency should be established and that it should deliver more consistently at local and regional level. To be effective the new agency structure and remit should be simplified; the links with individual local authorities should be redesigned and strengthened; and partnership with Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICS) should build on existing strengths. More proportionate links to RICs have to be considered to take greater account of scale and need.

Although the legislative responsibility for improvement lies with local authorities, ADES agrees that 'external' influence enables early learning and childcare settings, schools and educational establishments to improve. External influence can take different forms, but "external" support and challenge is essential along with purposeful and targeted support. The new agency should be well placed to perform such a role. The fostering of purposeful connections across local authorities and schools by the new agency would have the potential to create a strong climate of mutual trust and confidence to bring about improvement. Local authorities are well placed to provide continuity of contact with the agency and close partnership working would reduce duplication and maximise intelligence-led approaches to inspection. The role of inspection in providing assurance to parents, carers and learners on the quality of education being delivered should continue, however the new agency will need to work closely with the inspectorate to reduce duplication and maximise intelligence-led and evidence-based approaches.

The new agency could be re-structured in a number of ways which will be the subject of considerable analysis and debate. Some specific comments are contained in Appendix A. Consultation within the current agency and with key partners and stakeholders should be at the heart of all discussions. In the immediate term, key interim positions could be established to steer the transition process. This would be on a short-term basis under the management of the Director General of Education and Justice. From an ADES perspective, we would make the following points:

- A more intelligence-led, proportionate approach to the use of staff should be developed. The deployment and use of the regional team (if that continues) should be negotiated at local authority level and reflect the authority's needs. This approach would reduce bureaucracy. It will be essential that each local authority receives a consistent quality of delivery which is in line with their needs as well as scale.
- The function of NIF Advisors is not required and there is scope for redeployment. Including the Scottish Attainment Challenge within the NIF would strengthen the rationale to revisit the current structure. This would include a review of roles, remits and responsibilities.
- The input from subject specialists is valued and could be provided using fixed term secondments linked to specific activities.
- The current governance of Education Scotland has good representation from its non-executive Board members and there are regular meetings with key stakeholders. However, these need to be more open and transparent with published minutes and action points. Board membership should include representation from across educational establishments and the country.

Section 4

Inspection

The new independent inspectorate should inspect early learning and childcare settings, primary, secondary, ASL/special, services, colleges and CLD. Inspection of early learning and childcare, child protection and services for children needs to be considered in partnership with the Care Inspectorate and other scrutiny bodies. In the last few years, the emphasis for early learning and childcare has been the expansion of the number of hours from 600 to 1140. The expansion has been complex and continues to present challenges, particularly in terms of the skills of a rapidly expanded workforce. The burden from regulation from the Care Inspectorate must be considered and an attempt made to reduce in line with the principles of Crerar while ensuring that children's rights are protected. A clear understanding of the difference between regulation and inspection is required. In the run up to the establishment of the new agency, inspections should continue but with no formal evaluations. A report should be published with evaluative comments. This approach would maintain the emphasis on professional dialogue as schools and nurseries continue to recover from the Covid experience. (ADES members expressed strong disappointment at the recent announcement of a return to 'business as usual' inspections from August 2022.) ADES would offer the following points for consideration:

- Associate Assessors should continue to be involved as members of inspection teams.
- Each local authority and college should have a link HMI. A similar link should be developed for CLD. Link inspectors should provide support and challenge to local authorities and be responsive to emerging needs.
- The choice of schools to be inspected would be agreed with the local authority. In order to provide assurance to parents, carers and learners it is essential that schools which have not been inspected for a number of years are visited at the earliest opportunity.
- HGIOS4 has served schools well and will continue to be used as part of schools' self-evaluation. However, some of the quality indicators have not worked as well as originally intended. Therefore, over the next two years, there should be a revision of HGIOS4.
- A framework for the evaluation of local authorities should be considered in partnership with ADES to reflect the current activity involving Collaborative Improvement.

Section5 Qualifications

ADES does not have strong views on the separation of Accreditation and Regulation and the qualifications agency. Members recognised that the Covid 19 period had been very challenging for all involved in education. There was recognition that some changes to qualifications made prior to the pandemic had not impacted positively on young people. For example, the blanket removal of unit assessments from national qualifications had resulted in changes to external examinations and in some cases, the introduction of an external examination.

ADES members highlighted the consequences of not having an agreed qualification model as noted in the Stobart review. This could give rise to the potential for a new qualifications process being introduced and then ignored by higher education institutions. This could lead to universities setting their own entrance exams, as happens in places like Finland where they sit the Matriculation Exam - minimum five subjects and six hours of exams per subject.

There is a need for a balanced discussion about how we assess, not just for national qualifications, and for what purpose. It must be recognised that the role of the new agency will be to deliver qualifications and that the role of the system will be to determine assessment methodologies. In the same way it will be very important that teachers, pupils and parents understand the role of the qualifications agency. The one-handed clock reference in Stobart report³ that describes the trade-offs around validity, reliability and manageability in terms of the senior phase is helpful. In the same way, there is a need for a greater understanding of the role of the new agency in light of the assessment review being led by Professor Hayward. It is essential that partners, particularly those who work most closely with young people, are fully engaged in future developments of assessments and qualifications.

The ADES position can be summarised as follows:

- The breadth of qualifications should continue to be offered.
- The active involvement of serving teachers/lecturers should continue (verifiers, markers, moderators of assessments, etc.) with SQA staff being the experts on the logistics of the examination process.
- Links with local authorities have been positive and should continue.
- The composition of the Board of Management and the Advisory Council should be revisited to make it more representative.
- Consideration should be given to the creation of a young person's panel which would ensure that the voices of senior phase pupils and college students were heard.
- There should be a comprehensive and open communications plan to enable the new agency to gain lost ground.
- The new qualifications body should be more responsive to the needs of young people and to the system: it must listen more and be more agile and flexible. In terms of issues such as the role of digital learning, it should be proactive rather than reactive.
- Given that the OECD were supportive of the curriculum but noted the disjoint between BGE and the senior phase it was felt that, moving forwards, qualifications and the associated assessment methods should reflect the curriculum rather than the curriculum being driven by qualifications.

³ National Qualifications and Assessments (Professor G Stobart, 31 August 2021)

Section 6

Scottish Attainment Challenge / National Improvement Framework

The Scottish Attainment Challenge needs to be considered as part of the education reform. The same principles of openness, transparency and collaboration need to be applied to the governance of SAC. The following comment is instructive:

'... the approach we are recommending in Scotland is not about the introduction of particular techniques. Rather it is an overall way of thinking that involves processes of contextual analysis used to develop strategies that fit with particular circumstances. In so doing, the aim must be to make better use of the expertise within those situations and to build capacity to manage change through processes of collaboration and networks. To do this, local barriers need to be identified and addressed.'

'As we move into the next phase of the Challenge, there is an opportunity to shift the original focus of the initiative from developing specific interventions to close the poverty-related attainment gap to exploring the relationship between poverty and the variations in outcomes in more creative ways.'

(Changing Education Systems A research-based Approach, Mel Ainscow, Christopher Chapman and Mark Hadfield, 2020)

Points for consideration:

- The proposed link HMI for each authority should be actively engaged in supporting the local authority's planned approach to improving outcomes for those experiencing disadvantage.
- Local authorities should be represented in the governance arrangements for SAC with regular sharing of practice and plans. This could build on the success of 'Collaborative Improvement' which has been led by ADES with active involvement from Education Scotland.

ADES members also noted the importance of linking the overall vision to the NIF, including the agreed NIF measures. The National Improvement Framework was reviewed in 2021. It will be important that the National Improvement Framework is central to discussions during the National Debate on education. It is the view of ADES that consideration should be given to a review of the existing drivers and the measures. Given that the revised Scottish Attainment Challenge provides funding to all 32 authorities, there is scope to include the Scottish Attainment Challenge within the National Improvement Framework. This would streamline and reduce the existing layers of complexity in the system. It would also challenge the system to consider the improvement of outcomes for all young people experiencing disadvantage in all its forms, not just poverty.

28th July 2022

Appendix A

Specific practical suggestion on the new national agency and independent inspectorate

A new agency could be re-structured in various ways. For example - Learning & teaching, Curriculum & Assessment, Families, Leadership while HR and finance would be the backbone of a Corporate division/directorate. Glow support could be included in Corporate as part of the IT functions. The Accreditation and Regulation function of SQA could be included within Curriculum & Assessment.

Another approach could be to have learning, teaching, curriculum & assessment as one division – called Learning.

- Learning – includes learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment
- Families – includes family learning, CLD, early learning & childcare
- Leadership – leadership for learning, range of leadership pathways, including qualification(s) to demonstrate Standard for Headship, research and data, including the Insight team

Attainment Advisors could be part of the Learning Division or equivalent. A more intelligence-led, proportionate approach to attainment advisors should be developed in partnership with the proposed link inspectors and local authorities. Some attainment advisers would work across more than one local authority. Their deployment and those of the regional team (if that continues) would be negotiated with the local authority and be targeted to align with the authority's plans for Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) using their allocated central resource as well as their core funding. The streamlining which has been proposed would reduce the current level of bureaucracy that has appeared in some areas. It is also worth noting that the stretch aims being proposed by the government for SAC were raised as a growing concern for local authorities.

There was a clear view from ADES members that the function of NIF advisors was not required. Therefore, they would be redeployed. In the section on National Improvement Framework, the proposal to reduce bureaucracy by including SAC within the NIF would strengthen the rationale to reduce the staffing across attainment advisors and NIF advisors.

Subject specialists have been highlighted by some stakeholders as being valued, particularly for secondary schools. This needs some further thought in partnership with the inspectorate, the new agency and local authorities.

Independent Inspectorate

The new inspectorate could be established quickly. While legislation would be required for the new independent inspectorate, an interim position could be developed with the lead or interim lead for the inspectorate being line managed by the Director General of Education and Justice until the legislation is confirmed.

Legislative changes appear to be a barrier to progress taking place at pace. It should be recognised that there are equally dangers in delaying any change. The danger is that the system becomes cynical about a genuine desire for change. Given the drivers for change any delay in progressing change at pace appears like complacency and an acceptance that the current arrangements are adequate for our learners. Interim arrangements could be progressed which show the direction of travel, but which are not fixed. The inspectorate function beginning to operate independently of current Education Scotland functions would be a clear sign that the proposed changes set out in the Muir report do not need to wait until the Autumn of 2024.