

Health & Wellbeing Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

March 2026

Executive Summary

Overview

This evidence paper reflects a 12-month exploration of Scotland's Health and wellbeing (HWB) curriculum. While not exhaustive, it draws on a wide range of data sources, research, and lived experiences to inform its findings. Given the dynamic nature of this field—where new reports, surveys, and guidance emerge regularly—this paper aims to provide a broad and representative foundation for reflection and dialogue within the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) process.

The evidence surfaces several recurring themes that may be of relevance to stakeholders. Issues such as variability in delivery, curricular positioning, and pupil engagement—particularly across stages and settings—feature consistently. Points relating to equity, systemic factors, and the lived experience of learners also emerge, suggesting areas that may benefit from closer consideration. These findings do not represent definitive conclusions but rather identify aspects of current practice that could be explored further through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative processes during the CIC process.

Key themes

Systemic Challenges

The importance of the HWB curriculum has grown significantly in the eyes of external stakeholders in recent years, driven by increasing concerns around health, crime, and political priorities. However, within the education system itself, HWB still lacks parity of esteem with other curriculum areas. This is evident in how time is allocated, the delivery models used, and the extent to which HWB is reflected in school visions and values.

PSE

Mental, emotional and social education, particularly in secondary education, emerges as an area where current delivery may not fully meet learner needs. Primary and ELC settings often adopt a more holistic approach, while secondary PSE is frequently limited to 50 minutes per week. This disparity raises questions about the capacity of current structures to address complex topics such as mental health, substance misuse, relationships, and equality.

Emerging Trends

The HWB curriculum—and PSE in particular—is increasingly expected to address a wide range of urgent and complex societal issues, including vaping, knife crime, water safety, sunbed use, eating disorders, extremism, and online misogyny. These topics are often critical to young people's safety and wellbeing. However, the limited time allocated to PSE raises a dilemma: how can schools meaningfully engage with such a vast and evolving body of content? The volume and significance of these issues highlight the need for ongoing reflection on how the HWB curriculum is prioritised and supported within the education system.

Curriculum Relevance and Learner Engagement

Traditional, knowledge-based instruction appears less effective when delivered in isolation. Applied learning—through real-world problem-solving, reflection, and contextually relevant experiences—can enhance engagement. Participatory approaches such as youth-led initiatives and digital storytelling show promise but are not yet widely adopted.

Substance Misuse Education

Scotland's high rates of substance-related harm underscore the need for educational responses that go beyond awareness-raising. Inclusive, evidence-informed strategies that build resilience and promote life skills are increasingly seen as essential. Whole-school and cross-sector approaches, supported by up-to-date resources and professional development, may enhance the effectiveness of substance misuse education.

Food Education

Scotland's public health challenges related to diet and obesity are well documented. Despite this, Home Economics remains marginalised, with limited access to practical cookery due to funding and facilities. Learners value food education, but experiences are inconsistent across settings.

Physical Education

Physical Education remains popular with 11,865 entries in 2024. This shows sustained or growing participation; PE remains the third highest presenting subject after English and Maths. Improved professional development and clearer guidance may support more consistent and engaging delivery of physical activity across all levels as part of a holistic HWB approach.

Teacher Readiness

Teacher readiness, access to current materials, and mechanisms for evaluating impact remain central considerations. Embedding reflective practice and drawing on both qualitative and quantitative insights may support the ongoing refinement of HWB delivery and ensure responsiveness to Scotland's evolving health and wellbeing landscape.

Next Steps

Collectively, the evidence points to a complex and evolving landscape in which HWB curriculum delivery is shaped by structural, contextual, and experiential factors. The themes raised may inform how stakeholders approach future decision-making. The CIC process provides an opportunity to unpack these considerations in greater detail and support the development of coherent, inclusive approaches that reflect local contexts and emerging priorities in ways that better serve our children and young people.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This paper offers a snapshot of the current educational landscape, drawing on a diverse range of research and evidence to illuminate prevailing trends, challenges, and successes across contexts. It serves as a foundation for ongoing curriculum development, offering insights into the policy environment, learner experience, and professional perspectives. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data—alongside contributions from practitioners, learners, and the wider education community—it creates space for reflection and informed discussion. While not all available studies are included, those selected reflect the breadth of work currently shaping thinking in this area. The insights outlined here are intended to support Curriculum improvement Cycle (CIC) stakeholder groups as they consider key issues and navigate the next steps in the evolution of the health and wellbeing curriculum.

1.2 Sources of Evidence

A comprehensive body of research was developed through a collaborative effort involving representatives from Education Scotland’s Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CLTA) team, the Data, Performance and Research (DPR) team, and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This collaboration brought together a wide range of expertise to support the identification, evaluation, and organisation of relevant literature. The sources drawn upon, include, but are not limited to, peer-reviewed academic papers, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMI) publications, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) data, surveys, government data sets, research produced by national agencies, Scottish Government reports, and international publications from organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations. Additionally, the perspectives of children and young people are represented through the work of bodies such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland.

1.3 Scope of the Review

This paper examines Scotland’s curriculum across the full 3–18 learner journey, considering the range of educational experiences, learning progression, and outcomes from Early level through to the Senior Phase. Acknowledging that this journey begins at around age 3, the Early level spans Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings—such as nurseries and childminders—and extends into Primary 1 and beyond for some children. Its role is foundational, shaping the experiences, skills, and dispositions that underpin future learning and development. By considering the curriculum as a continuous and coherent pathway from early childhood to young adulthood, this evidence paper reflects the full spectrum of a learner’s experience.

This paper focuses on the health and wellbeing (HWB) curricular area as outlined within Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). It highlights key policy drivers and educational practices that support the development of mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing for all learners. It reflects on learning and achievement in the Broad General Education (BGE), drawing on national indicators and examines senior phase attainment across a range of qualifications,

including National Qualifications, Highers, and National Progression Awards (NPAs). The paper aims to support a holistic understanding of the current curricular landscape, highlighting key themes and emerging patterns that will help inform the CIC process.

1.4 Related National Policies

The Scottish Government's policies related to HWB within the curriculum are outlined here.

Food and Health

The Scottish Government has introduced a range of interconnected policies that place food education at the heart of the HWB curriculum. These policies aim to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to make informed food choices, develop healthy eating habits, and understand the wider social, cultural, and environmental impacts of food—laying the foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing. *Better Eating, Better Learning* (2014) plays a foundational role by emphasising the importance of nutritious school meals, practical food education, and collaborative approaches between schools, communities, and local authorities. It encourages whole-school approaches to healthy eating, promoting not only balanced diets but also the social and educational value of shared mealtimes. Building on this, *A Healthier Future – Scotland's Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan* (2018) sets out a national strategy to reduce diet-related health inequalities and tackle rising levels of obesity.

This framework provides schools with guidance and support to develop environments that promote healthy choices and encourage lifelong positive behaviours around food, physical activity, and body image. Importantly, *The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act* (2022) further strengthens Scotland's commitment to food policy by establishing a statutory requirement for national and local government bodies to produce Good Food Nation Plans. These plans aim to ensure that everyone in Scotland can access healthy, sustainable, and affordable food. In the context of education, this reinforces the HWB curriculum's aims by promoting food as a vehicle for learning about sustainability, equity, and wellbeing. Schools are positioned as key settings where children can engage meaningfully with food—from growing and cooking to understanding the environmental and social impacts of food systems.

Mental, Emotional, and Social

In addressing broader wellbeing issues, the *Included, Engaged and Involved* (Scottish Government, 2017) guidance supports schools in ensuring every learner is valued and supported. It focuses on reducing exclusion, promoting attendance, and creating inclusive learning environments, directly aligning with the holistic approach of the health and wellbeing curriculum. This commitment to HWB is further evidenced through the Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation (Scottish Government, 2024), which assesses progress across health and wellbeing, attainment, and equity—highlighting the integral link between pupil wellbeing and educational success. This evidence paper also reflects the principles of the UNCRC, which underpin Scotland's national approach to promoting and safeguarding children's rights. The rights to health, wellbeing, and education are embedded throughout the HWB curriculum, and they align closely with the wider aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence and the GIRFEC approach.

Physical Education (PE)

PE is another key strand of Scotland's health and wellbeing agenda. Under the *Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport (PEPAS) – A Strategic Framework* (Scottish Government, 2012) policy, all primary pupils are entitled to a minimum of two hours of quality PE per week and pupils in S1 to S4 to at least two periods. This expectation is underpinned by the *Active Scotland Outcomes Framework* (Scottish Government, 2018) and the *Physical Activity Delivery Plan* (Scottish Government, 2018). This plan outlines actions to encourage and support people in Scotland to be more active, aiming to reduce physical inactivity in adults and teenagers by 15% by 2030. It aligns with the World Health Organization's global plan on physical activity (WHO, 2018). These policies emphasise not just regular access to PE, but inclusive and meaningful experiences that support the wider aims of the HWB curriculum.

Personal and Social Education (PSE)

The Scottish Government's policy on PSE seeks to ensure all learners benefit from high-quality, consistent teaching that nurtures mental, emotional and social wellbeing. Following the 2019 *National Review* (Scottish Government, 2019), the policy aims to strengthen PSE through improved teacher training, enhanced learner voice, and better access to resources. It also supports the development of a relevant, inclusive curriculum by addressing key issues such as relationships, equality, and digital wellbeing.

Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood

The Delivery of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in Scottish schools: draft guidance (Scottish Government, 2021) directly supports the HWB curriculum by providing schools with clear, age-appropriate frameworks to deliver education on relationships, sexual health, and parenthood. It reinforces key HWB themes such as consent, equality, diversity, and respect, helping young people develop the skills and understanding necessary to build healthy, respectful relationships and make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

Planning for Choices and Change (PCC)

The Scottish Government has established a framework to support Planning for Choices and Changes (PCC) within the HWB curriculum, encouraging young people to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their futures. Central to this is the *Career Education Standard (CES) 3–18* (Scottish Government, 2015), which provides guidance for delivering career education across all stages of schooling. Complementing this, the *Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Strategy* (Skills Development Scotland, 2023), plays a vital role in offering careers advice and resources that empower learners to develop career management skills aligned with the wider curriculum. The *Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)* initiative (Scottish Government, 2014) further enhances this by fostering strong links between education and employers, facilitating meaningful work-based learning and smoother transitions into the labour market. Additionally, the *Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Empowering our People* policy (Scottish Government, 2022) underscores the importance of lifelong learning and adaptability in the context of economic recovery and social equity. Together, these policies embed career planning and work-related learning as integral to the HWB curriculum, promoting young people's confidence, resilience, and readiness for life beyond school.

Early level

Realising the Ambition: Being Me is Scotland's national practice guidance for early years, building on *Pre-Birth to Three* and *Building the Ambition*. It outlines the developmental needs of children from birth to Primary 1 (Education Scotland's focus is from age 3 onwards) and emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, play-based learning, and responsive pedagogy. The guidance supports continuity across transitions and highlights the foundational role of early learning in shaping lifelong wellbeing and educational outcomes. *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* supports nurseries and other ELC settings by providing a clear, research-informed framework for delivering the Early level curriculum in a way that is developmentally appropriate, child-centred, and responsive to individual needs. This policy closely aligns with the HWB curriculum by promoting mental, emotional, social, and physical development as integral to children's early education and lifelong wellbeing.

Collectively, these policy frameworks reflect Scotland's holistic commitment to placing HWB at the heart of the education system. From Early level through to the Senior Phase, national guidance promotes inclusive, equitable, and responsive learning environments that recognise the central role of HWB in shaping life outcomes. The coherence between curricular expectations, rights-based approaches, and cross-sector collaboration underlines the strategic intent of HWB within CfE—positioning it not as an isolated area of study, but as a vital thread woven through every aspect of a learner's educational experience.

2 National Data Sets

2.1 Qualifications

This section summarises Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) data on Home Economics (HE), Physical Education (PE) (including Dance), and Personal and Social Education (PSE) qualifications. The data presented in this evidence paper is drawn from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results for the 2023/24 academic session. Given that the research process commenced in October 2024, the 2023/24 results were the most current and complete dataset available at the time of analysis and therefore were used to inform the findings of this paper. Supporting data are detailed below.

Subject: Fashion and Textile

Levels: National 5 & Higher

Course structure:

This course comprises of 3 components – Question Paper (30%), Assignment (35%), Practical Activity (35%).

Candidate Performance:

N5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	510	240	375	460	495	10
2022	580	90	225	415	525	50
2023	630	125	295	465	570	60
2024	615	110	295	460	565	50

Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	255	130	195	245	250	*C
2022	360	80	180	265	325	35
2023	350	45	160	260	325	25
2024	295	50	145	245	280	15

Percentage change to A-C passes from 2023 to 2024		
Subject	National 5	Higher
Fashion and Textile Technology	2023 = 74% achieved A-C 2024 = 75% achieved A – C	2023 = 74% achieved A - C 2024 = 83% achieved A - C

National 5:

In 2023, 630 candidates entered, with 465 of them achieving A-C grades, resulting in an A-C pass rate of 74%. In 2024, despite a slight decrease in entries to 615, the A-C pass rate improved to almost 75% with 460 students achieving an A-C pass. Overall, there is a slight improvement in the proportion of candidates achieving A-C grades from 2023 to 2024.

Higher:

In 2023, 350 candidates entered, with 260 achieving A-C grades, leading to an A-C pass rate of 74%. In 2024, entries decreased to 295, but the pass rate increased significantly to approximately 83%, with 245 candidates achieving A-C grades.

Grade boundaries were set at notional values (40 – D, 50 – C, B – 60, A – 70) for N5 and Higher with the practical activity component performing the strongest across both courses. Course reports both highlight the need for candidates to be provided with more exam style questions and to pay particular attention to the 'command word' within each question. The number of entries across N5 and Higher has decreased slightly since 2023, whereas the A-C pass % has increased across both levels by 1% at N5 and 9% at Higher.

**Subject: Health and Food Technology
Higher**

Levels: National 5, Higher & Advanced

Course structure:

This course comprises of 2 components at each level – N5 & Higher both comprise of Question Paper (50%) and Assignment (50%), with the Advanced Higher course comprising of Question Paper (45%) and Project (55%).

N5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No award
2021	1700	585	1030	1445	1610	85
2022	1810	465	1000	1470	1675	135
2023	1650	500	915	1305	1515	135
2024	1530	335	675	1065	1320	210

Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No award
2021	1435	670	1020	1285	1380	60
2022	1245	240	565	890	1100	145
2023	1390	175	490	880	1180	210
2024	1385	275	590	915	1155	230

Advanced Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	40	15	25	40	40	*C
2022	70	15	35	55	65	*C
2023	30	*C	10	20	25	*C
2024	45	*C	5	25	35	10

Percentage change to A-C passes from 2023 to 2024			
Subject	National 5 Attainment	Higher	Advanced Higher
Health and Food Technology	2023 = 79% achieved A-C	2023 = 63% achieved A-C	2023 = 67% achieved A-C
	2024 = 82% achieved A-C	2024 = 66% achieved A-C	2024 = 56% achieved A-C

National 5:

Total entries decreased from 1,700 in 2021 to 1,530 in 2024. The percentage of students achieving A-C grades increased from 79% in 2023 to 82% in 2024. The number of students receiving an A grade has decreased over the years, with 585 in 2021 down to 335 in 2024.

Higher:

Entries fluctuated slightly, peaking at 1,435 in 2021 and decreasing to 1,385 in 2024. The percentage of A-C passes rose from 63% in 2023 to 66% in 2024. The number of A grades showed a decline from 670 in 2021 to 275 in 2024.

Advanced Higher:

Entries saw a significant decline from 70 in 2022 to 45 in 2024. The percentage of A-C passes decreased from 67% in 2023 to 56% in 2024. The number of students achieving A grades has

been low and inconsistent, peaking at 15 in 2021 and 2022, but dropping to fewer in subsequent years.

Feedback from course reports highlighted the need to support candidates at N5 level with 'explain' command word questions as some learners are still having difficulty with the detail of response required. At Higher level some candidates are lacking the depth of knowledge required in the question paper component to access a greater range of marks and most assignments lacked relevant detail in the research section. At Advanced Higher level the question paper and project performed as expected.

Course structure:

This course comprises of 2 components –Assignment (30%), Practical Activity (70%).

N5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	1200	500	850	110	1180	25
2022	1465	430	795	1145	1330	135
2023	1285	350	715	995	1180	100
2024	1255	185	540	870	1120	135

National 5:

In 2021, there were 1,200 entries, with category A receiving 500, A-B 850, A-C 1110, A-D 1,180, and 25 entries receiving no awards. The following year, 2022, saw an increase in entries to 1,465, but a drop in category A to 430 and A-B to 795, while A-D rose significantly to 1,330. In 2023, entries decreased to 1,285, with further declines in category A (350) and A-B (715), but A-D remained high at 1,180. The 2024 entries fell slightly to 1,255, with category A decreasing to 185, A-B to 540, and A-D dropping to 1,120, while the No Award category saw 135 entries. Overall, the trend indicates fluctuating participation and varying results across categories over the four years.

Grade boundaries across all levels were set higher than notional values, N5 A – 76, B – 67, C – 58 and D – 49.

Course report states that all components performed as expected and verification feedback reported that assessors had a clear understanding of marking instructions regarding practical activity.

Course structure:

This course comprises of 3 components – Question Paper (25%), Assignment (13.5%), Practical Activity (61.5%).

N5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	6305	2555	4530	5840	6195	115
2022	6885	1905	4280	5935	6580	305
2023	7465	2310	4795	6455	7165	300
2024	8070	2340	4780	6680	7565	505

National 5:

The total number of entries shows a steady increase from 6,305 in 2021 to 8,070 in 2024. In terms of awards, the A category received the highest number of entries, peaking at 2,555 in 2021 and fluctuating around 2,310 to 2,340 in subsequent years. Conversely, the A-B, A-C, and A-D categories also exhibit varying entries, with A-B showing a dip from 4,530 in 2021 to 4,280 in 2022. The "No Award" category experienced a rise in entries from 115 in 2021 to 505 in 2024, indicating a potential increase in entries without recognition. Overall, while entries have grown, the distribution among award categories has shown some variability.

Grade boundaries were set slightly higher than notional values, A – 73, B – 63, C- 53 and D – 43.

Following previous years trends the practical activity course component performed stronger than question paper component (percentage average score across 3 components – practical activity – 72%, question paper 54%, assignment 52%).

Course structure:

National 5 PE – Portfolio (50%) and Performance (50%)

Higher PE – Question paper (50%) and Performance (50%)

Adv Higher PE – Project (70%) and Performance (30%)

National 5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No award
2021	18375	11480	15570	17850	18275	100
2022	19180	10510	15970	18450	19050	130
2023	20025	10970	16370	19060	19860	165
2024	20350	9675	15965	19305	20185	160

Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No award
2021	11805	5345	8510	10960	11625	190
2022	11850	3830	7710	10530	11560	290
2023	11485	3820	7315	10135	11160	325
2024	11665	3170	6900	10105	11360	305

Advanced Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	805	405	625	760	795	15
2022	1050	285	570	835	1005	45
2023	945	210	450	710	880	65
2024	990	155	415	685	920	70

Percentage change to A-C passes from 2023 to 2024			
Subject	National 5	Higher	Advanced Higher
Physical Education	2023 = 95% achieved A-C	2023 = 88% achieved A-C	2023 = 75% achieved A-C
	2024 = 95% achieved A-C	2024 = 87% achieved A-C	2024 = 69% achieved A-C

National 5:

Entries increased from 18,375 in 2021 to 20,350 in 2024. The number of students achieving A-C grades remained high, with 95% achieving A-C in both 2023 and 2024. No award rates fluctuated slightly, with 100 in 2021 reducing to 160 in 2024.

Higher:

The number of entries remained relatively stable, ranging from 11,485 in 2023 to 11,865 in 2024. A-C achievement rates decreased slightly from 88% in 2023 to 87% in 2024. No award rates decreased from 325 in 2023 to 305 in 2024.

Advanced Higher:

Entries increased from 945 in 2023 to 990 in 2024. A-C achievement rates decreased significantly from 75% in 2023 to 69% in 2024. No award rates rose from 65 in 2023 to 70 in 2024

The total number of National 5 entries has increased for the fourth consecutive year, with grade boundaries remaining unchanged and slightly above the notional values: A – 87, B – 74, C – 61, and D – 48.

In contrast, the total number of Higher entries has risen since 2023, with grade boundaries adjusting slightly to fall below the notional values: A – 69, B – 59, C – 49, and D – 39. Overall, the total number of entries has increased by 5%, with grade boundaries slightly revised from 2023: A – 67, B – 56, C – 46, and D – 35, compared to the previous year's boundaries of A – 69, B – 58, C – 48, and D – 37.

The National 5 individual course components performed similarly to those in 2023, with the SQA course report confirming that the components met expectations. The Higher individual course components also showed similar results compared to 2023, and the SQA course report validated that these components performed as anticipated. However, for the Advanced Higher level, the Project course component did not perform as well as expected, leading to an 8% decrease in A-C attainment.

Subject: Dance**Levels: National 5 & Higher****Course structure:**

N5 Dance course comprises of 3 components – Question Paper (20%), Performance (35%), Practical Activity (45%)

Higher Dance course comprises of 3 components - Question Paper (30%), Performance (40%), Practical Activity (30%)

N5	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	815	415	580	740	790	20
2022	760	255	440	625	725	40
2023	765	240	445	620	720	45
2024	825	255	475	640	755	70

Higher	Entries	A	A-B	A-C	A-D	No Award
2021	495	300	410	475	490	5
2022	490	145	270	300	450	40
2023	475	145	265	365	440	35
2024	425	105	230	320	390	30

Percentage change to A-C passes from 2023 to 2024		
Subject	National 5	Higher
Dance	2023 = 81% achieved A-C 2024 = 78% achieved A-C	2023 = 77% achieved A-C 2024 = 75% achieved A-C

National 5:

Entries have generally increased from 2021 (815) to 2024 (825). The number of students achieving grades A, A-B, A-C, and A-D has fluctuated over the years, with A-C % passes showing interesting trends: A-C passes in 2023 were 81%, and they slightly decreased in 2024 to 640 78%. The number of students with "No Award" has also increased from 20 in 2021 to 70 in 2024.

Higher:

Entries have decreased from 2021 (495) to 2024 (425). A-C achievements in Higher have also shown a decline: A-C passes in 2023 were at 365 (77%), dropping to 320 (75%) in 2024. The "No Award" category has decreased slightly from 5 in 2021 to 30 in 2024.

Grade boundaries at N5 are in line with notional values with Higher grade boundaries set at A – 68, B – 58, C – 38 and D – 38

Question paper component follows previous years trends by underperforming, however the question paper average in 2024 is higher than in 2023. The performance course component continues to perform well.

Skills for Work, Awards and National Progression Awards

For SCQF level 5 National Progression Awards (NPAs), 30% are derived from Health and Wellbeing (HWB) subjects, such as Hospitality, Dance and Sport and Fitness, which equip learners with essential skills and knowledge in their chosen fields.

For SCQF level 6 National Progression Awards (NPAs), 25% are derived from Health and Wellbeing (HWB) subjects, such as Professional Cookery, Sports Development and Exercise and Fitness, which equip learners with essential skills and knowledge in their chosen fields.

Home Economics

Skills for Work	Entries				Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 - Hospitality	170	175	475		130	135	330	
SCQF Level 5 - Hospitality	425	455	735	975	340	370	615	835

Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF 4 Level - Culinary Ability: Food Preparation Award	0	0	10	

National Progression Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 - Bakery	690	560	775	790
SCQF Level 4 - Professional Cookery	135	160	250	220
SCQF Level 5 - Hospitality	5	30	90	80

Physical Education:

Skills for Work	Entries				Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 - Sport & Recreation	160	120	140	225	110	90	115	175
SCQF Level 5 – Sport & Recreation	1495	1450	1855	1940	1290	1280	1705	1735

Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF 5 Level - Leadership	530	645	890	905
SCQF 6 Level - Leadership	3495	3595	4520	5220

National Progression Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 - Dance	125	120	130	130
SCQF Level 4 – 6 Sports Coaching**				
SCQF Level 5 - Dance	70	80	120	95
SCQF Level 5 – Sport & Fitness: Individual	110	120	150	125
SCQF Level 5 – Sport & Fitness: Team Sports	885	620	330	1165
SCQF Level 5 – Sports Coaching **				
SCQF Level 6 – Achieving Excellence in Sport	145	195	275	430
SCQF Level 6 – Exercise and Fitness	855	990	1040	1295
SCQF Level 6 – Sports Coaching **				
SCQF Level 6 – Sports Development	658	820	1100	1115

Personal and Social Education

Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 - Employability Award	3590	3320	3710	4935
SCQF Level 4 - Mental Health and Wellbeing	630	1325	1345	985
SCQF Level 4 – Personal Development Award	640	635	430	500
SCQF Level 4 - Wellbeing Award	1085	865	1035	790
SCQF Level 5 – Mental Health and Wellbeing	1595	2005	2285	2865
SCQF Level 5 – Personal Development Award	675	775	720	855
SCQF Level 5 – Wellbeing Award	1505	2325	2770	3050
SCQF Level 6 – Personal Development Award	1405	1390	1535	1350

National Progression Awards	Awarded			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
SCQF Level 4 – PC Passport	235	220	245	325
SCQF Level 5 – PC Passport	225	225	420	335
SCQF Level 6 – PC Passport	405	335	380	370

In recent years, there has been an uptake in centres using awards like the Wellbeing Award and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Award to provide structure in Personal and Social Education (PSE). Entries for the N5 Wellbeing Award have increased from 1,505 in 2021 to 3,050 in 2024, while entries for the N5 Mental Health and Wellbeing Award rose from 1,595 in 2021 to 2,865.

2.2 Labour market information

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provide labour market information using a consistent evidence base to inform future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets and forecasts. They work with key partners and stakeholders in the production of regional skills assessments to ensure an inclusive approach to their development, dissemination and utilisation. Regional skills assessments (RSAs) are published annually, covering all Regional Outcome Agreement areas, City and Growth Deal Regions and rural Scotland. The RSAs offer detailed information on regional labour markets across the country. The data included in these publications, including Oxford Economics forecast data, is the most up-to-date available at the time of writing.

The following graphs show labour market information access in November 2024 to show a 10-year forecast for Scotland as a whole. They were taken from the [SDS skills planning data matrix](#).

Employment forecast for 2034 by industry:

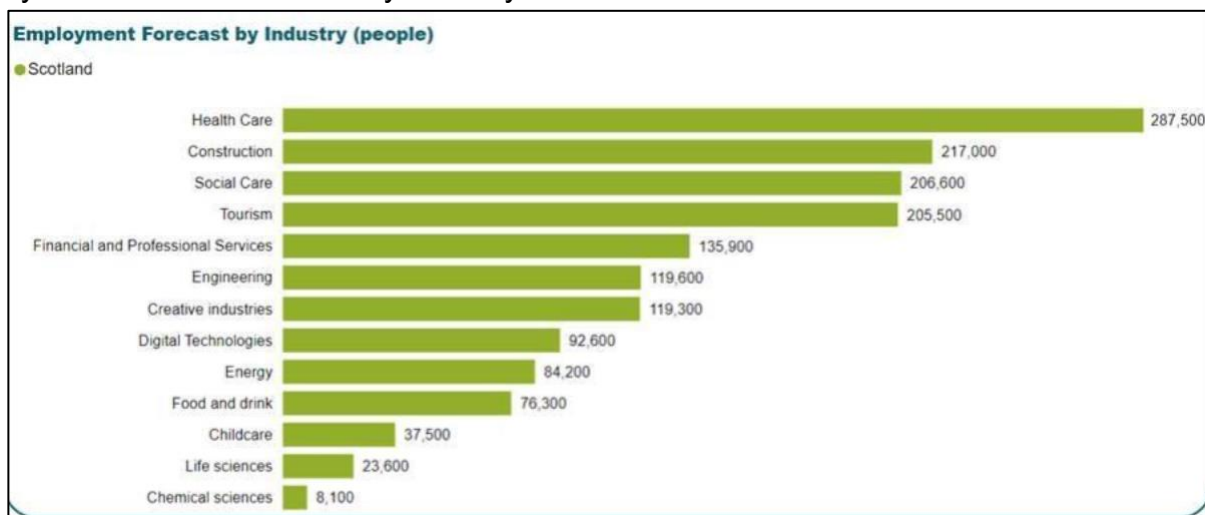


Figure 1 - Future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2024)

As can be seen from the graph; health care, construction and social care are predicted to be the highest employing industries.

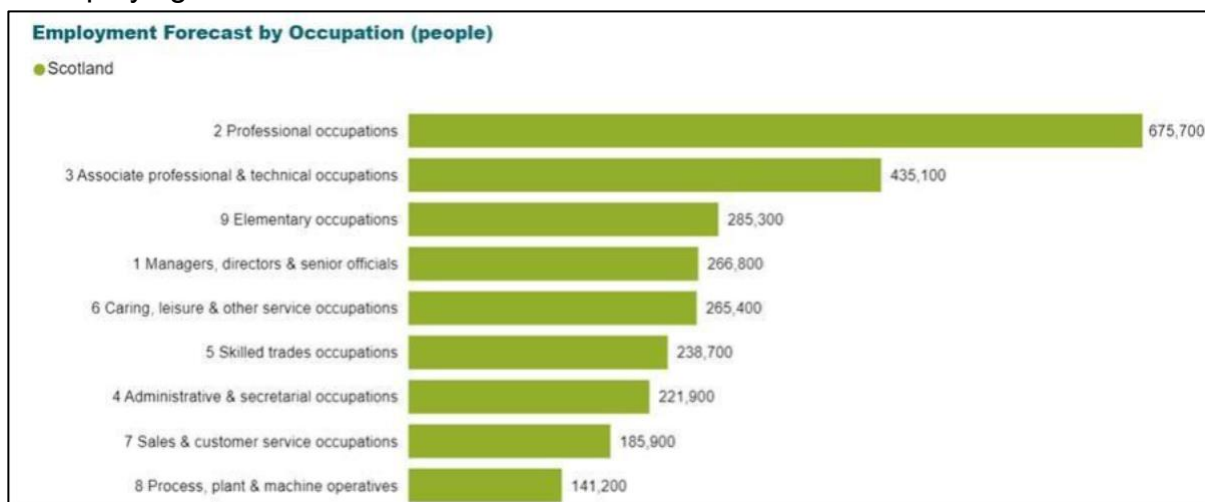


Figure 2 - Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by occupation for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2024)

This has implications for the range of pathways at different SCQF levels needed to enable learners to achieve the right level of qualifications for the jobs available. HWB has a very diverse range of pathways available.

Total requirement by industry (2027-2034):

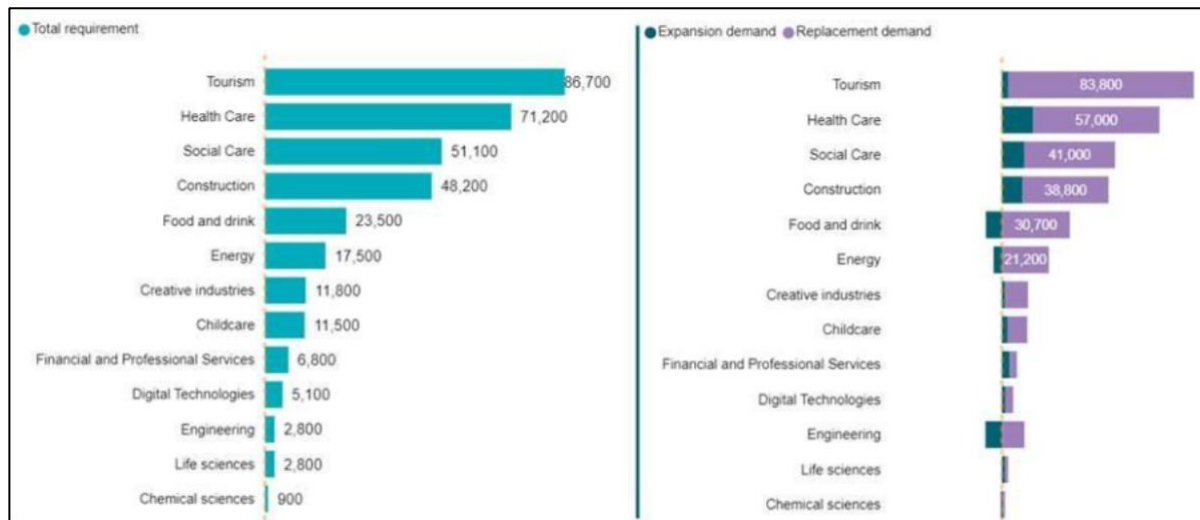


Figure 3 - Bar chart showing the total requirement by industry for Scotland in 2027-2034 (SDS, 2024) see glossary for definition of the terms: total requirement, expansion demand, replacement demand)

Despite healthcare being forecast to be the largest employing industry in 2034, the actual number of jobs needed to be filled is forecast to be greatest in tourism. The above graph on the right shows how much an industry is forecast to expand or reduce in requirement, as well as the likely replacement requirement (i.e. how many more people will be required due to people leaving the workforce). The graph on the left-hand side shows the total requirement. These numbers are different from the overall employment forecast as these graphs only show additional requirements and not those who will remain working in these industries. Health care, social care, and construction show the greatest expansion demand, with food and drink, energy, and engineering showing a negative expansion i.e. a reduction in requirements.

The recently published *Young People’s Career Ambitions* report (SDS, 2025) report collects views from school leavers on a range of areas – ideal job and preferred industries being just one of these. In this report over 3000 participants engaged. One of the questions asked was: “Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?.” The following infographic shows a thematic analysis of their responses. The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned.

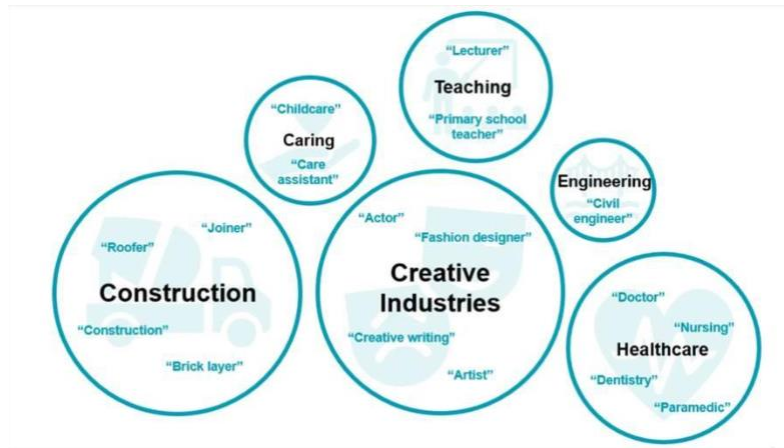


Figure 4 - Thematic analysis of young people’s responses to the question: “Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?”

Whilst there are some similarities to the labour market information, the largest area of interest to young people is creative industries, for which the requirement is less than half of that of healthcare (the top forecast industry in the labour market information). It can be said therefore that there is a mismatch in terms of what young people are interested in and what jobs will be available for them.

Interestingly, a [supporting infographic to the report](#) (SDS 2025) shows that the preferred industry depends on a range of characteristics. For example, the following infographic shows the difference between males and females:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Female		Male	
Medicine and health	21%	Engineering	28%
Caring	17%	Construction	23%
Creative Industries	16%	Digital, computing, and IT	15%
Teaching / education	15%	Sport	12%
Media	11%	Media	10%

Figure 5 -

There are also differences in terms of ethnicity however the report has low sample numbers for this and does not disaggregate by ethnicity (only offering the categories 'white' and 'minority ethnic'):

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Minority Ethnic		White	
Medicine and health	23%	Engineering	16%
Digital, computing, and IT	17%	Construction	14%
Media	16%	Creative Industries	13%
Engineering	13%	Medicine and health	12%
Creative Industries	12%	Teaching / education	12%

Figure 6 -

It also shows that there are marked differences in young people who are LGBT:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
LGBT		Non-LGBT	
Creative Industries	29%	Engineering	18%
Media	20%	Construction	15%
Digital, computing, and IT	14%	Medicine and health	13%
Caring	14%	Teaching / education	11%
Medicine and health	14%	Sport	11%

Figure 7 -

There is also a significant difference in industries selected for those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) compared to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5):

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
SIMD 1		SIMD 5	
Engineering	15%	Medicine and health	18%
Construction	14%	Engineering	16%
Caring	14%	Creative Industries	14%
Medicine and health	11%	Teaching / education	12%
Creative Industries	11%	Media	11%

Figure 8 -

Care experienced children compared to non-care-experienced children also show differences in their preferred industries:


 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
CE		Not CE	
Construction	20%	Engineering	16%
Caring	12%	Creative Industries	14%
Hospitality	12%	Medicine and health	13%
Armed forces, policing or security	10%	Construction	12%
Engineering	10%	Teaching / education	11%

Figure 9 -

Learners with disabilities and those without also shows different preferences:


 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Disabled		Non-disabled	
Creative Industries	21%	Engineering	18%
Medicine and health	16%	Construction	15%
Caring	15%	Medicine and health	12%
Teaching / education	14%	Digital, computing, and IT	11%
Media	13%	Teaching / education	11%

Figure 10 -

The report also highlights subtle differences in how each group identified key influencers on their career choices. While most listed parents and carers as their primary influence, care-experienced learners notably identified careers advisors as their top source of guidance. Following these, careers advisors were the next most frequently mentioned across groups, followed by other family members. Teachers also appeared as notable influencers.

Finally, the factors influencing young people's choice of industry vary according to individual characteristics, with most citing either their personal interests and hobbies or financial necessity as key drivers. Achieved qualifications were also a significant factor, alongside education and training, though to a slightly lesser extent. Notably, 35% of respondents reported that social media played a role in their decision-making—TikTok was the most influential platform, followed by Instagram and YouTube. These insights underscore the need for inclusive and responsive career education that resonates with all learners and incorporates relevant labour market information to support informed choices. It is suggested that the Curriculum Improvement Cycle should take these differences into account when reviewing the structure and content of curricular areas, with a particular focus on skills development.

2.3 National Statistics

An effective analysis of the impact of the HWB curriculum and Responsibility of All (RoA) on student outcomes must go beyond academic performance data (as provided by the SQA) and consider a broader range of national statistics. As HWB is not formally assessed through national standardised tools in Early Learning and Childcare settings (ELC), Primary, or the Broad General Education (BGE) phases, insight must be drawn from student surveys, national health and education reports, and broader public datasets. The following sections synthesise key findings from some major Scottish and UK-wide sources from the past ten years.

2.3.1 Children and Young People’s Wellbeing: Insights from Surveys and Reports

While the surveys and reports examined in this section span a broad range of themes across the Scottish Curriculum, many of their findings bear significant relevance to the HWB curriculum. Though not all were designed with a specific HWB lens, the views expressed by educators, learners, parents, and other partners offer valuable insights into the HWB curriculum. The selection of reports is not exhaustive; rather, it aims to provide a representative cross section of diverse perspectives and emergent themes that directly inform and challenge the HWB curriculum. Each source has been carefully chosen for its relevance to key areas such as mental and emotional wellbeing, digital safety, nutrition, physical activity and substance misuse—domains that sit at the heart of Scotland’s HWB curriculum.

2.3.2 The Good Childhood Report (2024)

This report paints a concerning picture of declining wellbeing among children and young people in the UK. Key findings include:

- Girls are significantly less happy than boys in multiple domains, including life overall, family relationships, appearance, and school.
- School experience is the area with the highest reported dissatisfaction.
- The UK ranks lower than many European counterparts on nearly all indicators of child wellbeing.

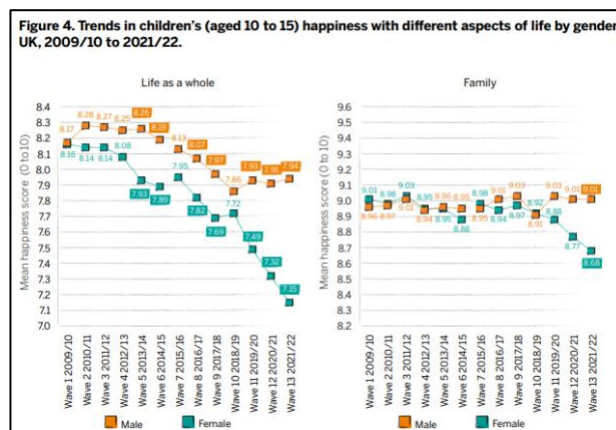


Figure 11 – Trends in children’s (aged 10-15) happiness with different aspects of life by gender, UK, 2009/10 to 2021/22

It is suggested that these findings highlight the urgent need to address mental health and emotional wellbeing more deeply within curricular and whole-school approaches.

2.3.3 SAMH Report – Going to Be Alright (2017)

This national study of 12–18-year-olds identified:

- A worsening trend in mental health, particularly for girls aged around 15.
- School pressures, bullying, and care experience as contributing factors to mental ill-health.
- The need for targeted interventions for vulnerable groups, including those from marginalised backgrounds.

Mental wellbeing deteriorates with age, especially around the S4 stage, suggesting the need for earlier, sustained mental health focus embedded within HWB education.

2.3.4 Health and wellbeing Census: Deprivation, gender, and School stage (2022)

This national census provides rich insights into the lived experiences of pupils across Scotland:

- Variations by Stage and Gender.
- Positive perceptions of school and wellbeing decrease with age, particularly through secondary stages (S1–S4).
- Girls consistently report more negative perceptions than boys in areas including:
 - Mental and emotional wellbeing
 - School-related stress
 - Physical health, body image, and sleep
 - Ability to access trusted adults
 - Impact of deprivation.
- Pupils from areas of high deprivation are more likely to report:
 - Lower levels of physical activity and poorer sleep quality
 - Higher levels of loneliness and mental health concerns
 - Fewer trusted adults and support networks
 - Higher rates of substance use, particularly e-cigarette and tobacco use.

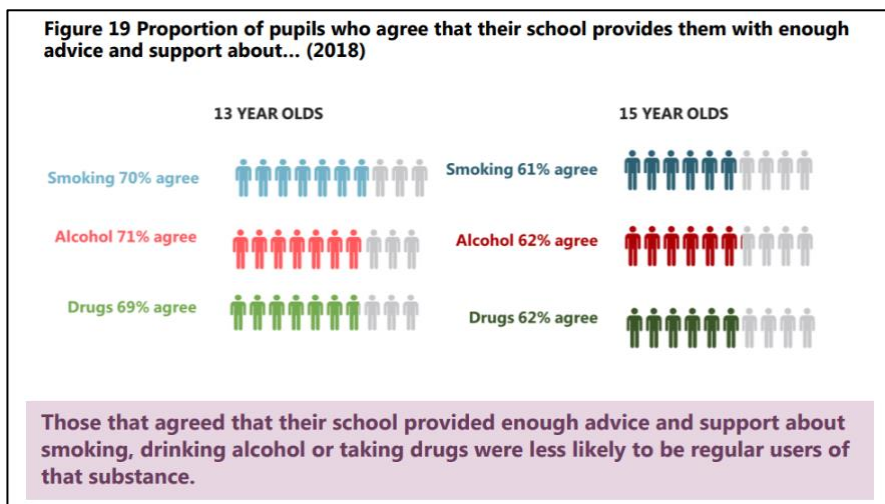


Figure 12 – Proportion of pupils who agree that their school provides them with enough advice and support ... (2018)

These patterns underscore the intersecting roles of socioeconomic background, gender, and developmental stage in influencing outcomes.

2.3.5 Growing Up in Scotland study findings (2019)

While the findings of this survey offer valuable insights across all aspects of a child’s development, they carry particular significance for HWB, especially within the context of Responsibility of All (RoA). The themes emerging—such as emotional resilience, relationships, and sense of belonging—speak directly to the foundational aims of HWB and the shared duty of all educators to support learners’ holistic growth.

- Holistic Approach- The implementation of HWB as a RoA has created a more integrated approach to children and young people wellbeing across curriculum areas.
- Mental Health Outcomes- There are improvements in students’ self-reported mental wellbeing in schools where HWB is effectively implemented.
- Attainment Connection- Evidence suggests a correlation between health and wellbeing interventions (not HWB curriculum) and reduced attainment gaps, particularly for disadvantaged students.

Implementation Challenges

- Varying implementation- There is significant variation in how RoA is interpreted and implemented across Scottish schools, leading to inconsistent outcomes.
- Teacher confidence- Many teachers outside of dedicated HWB subjects report lower confidence in delivering wellbeing-focused content, despite the RoA framework.
- Resource allocation- Uneven resource distribution for HWB initiatives across different local authorities is identified.

Physical Education Component

- PE integration- PE has been repositioned within the broader HWB framework, with mixed results for specialised PE outcomes.

- Activity levels- The paper mentions moderate improvements in physical activity levels in schools with strong cross-curricular HWB implementation.

These points provide evidence for educators on both the positive impacts and ongoing challenges of implementing HWB as a RoA across the Scottish education system.

2.3.6 Healthy Behaviour in School Children Report (2022)

1. Health and Sleep- only 23% of adolescents rated their health as 'excellent', with notable decline in self-rated health among 15-year-old girls. Nearly half experienced multiple health complaints weekly, with a significant increase since 2018. Sleep difficulties rose from 30% to 37% between 2018 and 2022, with lower sleep quality reported by girls and those from lower affluence families.
2. Mental Health and wellbeing- 80% of young people reported high life satisfaction, but only 27% felt very happy, particularly lower among girls. Confidence levels were at their lowest in 28 years.
3. Impact of COVID-19- The pandemic had mixed effects, with positive impacts on family relations and friendships, but negative impacts on mental health and school performance, especially among older girls.
4. Relationships and Support- Most adolescents lived with both parents, and while family support was high, it decreased with age. Communication with parents was easier for boys than girls.
5. Eating Behaviours and Oral Health- Breakfast consumption declined, while fruit and vegetable intake increased. Healthier eating behaviours were more common among those from higher affluence families.

Overall, the report highlights significant concerns regarding adolescent health, mental wellbeing, and the impact of socioeconomic factors on health behaviours.

2.3.7 Knife Crime

According to the Scottish Government's *Recorded Crime in Scotland 2023–24* report, there were 5,761 recorded crimes involving knives or sharp instruments in 2020–21, marking a 10% increase from the previous year.

In 2024, 91 individuals under the age of 18 in Scotland were found carrying a knife or bladed weapon through police stop-and-search procedures, equating to approximately one incident every four days. Among these cases was a 10-year-old in Edinburgh, with additional incidents involving 12- and 13-year-olds in Glasgow, Ayrshire, and Lanarkshire. Teenagers accounted for nearly one-third of all positive knife searches conducted by police during the year. (The Scotsman, 2024)

These figures could underscore the urgent need to review and strengthen the HWB curriculum to address the complex social, emotional, and behavioural factors contributing to youth violence.

2.3.8 Obesity

The most recent obesity statistics from the *Scottish Health Survey 2024* (published in March 2025) show that:

- 29% of adults in Scotland are classified as obese.
- 65% of adults are either overweight or obese.
- Among children aged 2–15, 16% are obese, with a further 13% overweight.

These figures reflect a slight improvement from previous years but still highlight persistent health inequalities, particularly in more deprived areas.

According to the *Scottish Health Survey and Obesity Action Scotland's 2024 briefing*, 18% of children aged 2–15 in Scotland were at risk of obesity in 2022. Among Primary 1 pupils during the 2022/23 academic year, 21.9% were at risk of overweight or obesity, with 10.5% at risk of obesity alone. Children living in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to be at risk of obesity compared to those in the least deprived areas (13.9% vs 6.8%).

These statistics highlight the ongoing challenge of childhood obesity and the deep-rooted health inequalities affecting Scotland's most deprived communities. Consideration of the HWB curriculum arguably, presents a critical opportunity to consider equitable, evidence-informed approaches to nutrition education, physical activity, and lifestyle awareness.

2.3.9 Drugs

Scotland continues to face a significant public health challenge with 1,172 drug misuse deaths recorded in 2023, marking a 12% increase from the previous year (National Records of Scotland, 2024). While many of these deaths occur in adults aged 35–54, the implications for young people are profound and must be addressed.

- Drug misuse is not only a health issue—it is deeply intertwined with social inequality. According to the National Records of Scotland, individuals living in the most deprived areas are **over 15 times more likely to die** from drug misuse than those in the least deprived areas. This disparity is far greater than for other causes of death.
- Gender also plays a role—men are twice as likely to die from drug misuse as women, although the gap has narrowed over time.
- The average age of drug misuse deaths has risen from 32 in 2000 to 45 in 2023, reflecting the progressive nature of substance dependency and the long-term impact of early exposure and trauma.

A comprehensive approach to substance education may include consideration of the social and emotional factors associated with substance use, as well as the development of resilience and decision-making skills. In some communities, particularly those experiencing higher levels of deprivation, these themes may be especially relevant. Including such topics in HWB education can offer opportunities for learners to engage with issues related to addiction, recovery, and the associated societal perceptions.

2.3.10 Alcohol

Recent data from the National Records of Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2024) reveals that alcohol-specific deaths remain at a 15-year high, with 1,277 lives lost in 2023 alone. While most of these deaths occur in older age groups, the implications for children and young people are significant and remain relevant to the HWB curriculum.

Alcoholism, or Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD), is widely recognised as a progressive illness—one that intensifies over time if left untreated. According to the Mayo Clinic and other addiction specialists, AUD is defined as a *chronic and often progressive disease* that includes problems controlling drinking, preoccupation with alcohol, and continued use despite harmful consequences (Mayo Clinic, 2023). This progression underscores the importance of early intervention and education.

Although the demographic most affected by alcohol-related deaths is older, the roots of problematic alcohol use often begin in adolescence. Exposure to alcohol-related messaging, peer pressure, and social media influence can shape attitudes and behaviours long before clinical symptoms emerge. In fact, 35% of young people have cited social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube as influential in shaping their views on alcohol (Jones, 2025).

Evidence highlights a range of themes that are often addressed through alcohol education within the PSE curriculum.

These may include:

- Informed decision-making.
- Resilience in the face of peer and societal influences.
- The examination of common perceptions surrounding alcohol use.

In addition, learners may explore the long-term health effects associated with alcohol misuse and consider perspectives on addiction as a health-related issue. Within the HWB curriculum, such themes are sometimes integrated as part of broader efforts to support mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.

These findings suggest that the HWB curriculum may need to remain responsive to the evolving social and cultural influences shaping young people's attitudes toward alcohol. The persistence of alcohol-related harm, alongside the early formation of beliefs and behaviours in adolescence, reinforces the relevance of curricular themes such as resilience, informed decision-making, and critical engagement with media. As part of the curriculum improvement cycle, such evidence may inform ongoing reflection on how effectively these issues are addressed across learning experiences.

2.3.11 Suicide

Suicide remains a significant public health concern in Scotland. According to the Scottish Government's most recent data, there were 715 deaths by suicide in 2022, representing a slight increase from previous years (Scottish Government, 2023). The suicide rate in Scotland is higher than the UK average, with young people and men particularly at risk. Notably, suicide is one of the leading causes of death among individuals aged 15 to 34 years (NHS Scotland, 2023). These statistics highlight the urgent need for preventative measures that address mental health and wellbeing from an early age.

Awareness of the prevalence and impact of suicide play a role in curriculum development, with mental health, emotional regulation, and coping strategies forming key areas of focus. This focus reflects national frameworks such as *Getting It Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC), which emphasises early intervention and a holistic approach to wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2018). Within the HWB curriculum, education related to suicide prevention and mental health aims to address stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviours, contributing to the broader context of national efforts to monitor and respond to suicide and mental health challenges in Scotland.

2.3.12 Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical social issue in Scotland, with significant implications for the health and wellbeing and safety of children and young people. Scottish Government statistics indicate that one in three women in Scotland experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives, and nearly half of all women have experienced some form of sexual harassment or violence (Scottish Government, 2022). Young people are also affected, with evidence showing that teenage girls and young women are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence and coercive control (Scottish Women's Aid, 2023).

In response, education on gender-based violence could form part of the HWB curriculum in Scottish schools. National guidance such as the *RSHP Statutory Guidance* (Scottish Government, 2014) supports schools in delivering age-appropriate teaching on topics related to consent, healthy relationships, respect, and the prevention of gender-based violence (Scottish Government, 2014). This guidance is currently under review. This aspect of education aims to raise awareness, challenge harmful gender norms, and equip young people with the knowledge and skills to identify, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence. The inclusion of GBV education in schools aligns with broader government strategies, including the *Equally Safe* strategy, Scotland's national approach to preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls (Scottish Government, 2016). Through these integrated efforts, schools contribute to fostering a culture of respect and equality, which is fundamental to improving safety and wellbeing for all.

In summary, national statistics reveal the wide range of factors that shape the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland. Issues such as mental health, substance misuse, gender-based violence, physical health, and deprivation all have an impact on learners' experiences and outcomes. While the HWB curriculum and the Responsibility of All (RoA) framework are designed to support holistic development, the data show that inequalities persist

across gender, age, and socioeconomic background. These findings highlight the value of using national data to inform the CIC process, helping to ensure that educational approaches remain responsive to the lived realities of Scotland's young people.

3 International Reports and Comparative Studies

International reports offer valuable insights into global trends shaping HWB curricula, providing a broader context for national curriculum development in Scotland. Comparative studies from organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Lancet Commission highlight the most pervasive issues and innovative approaches being considered.

3.1 Making Physical Education Dynamic and Inclusive for 2030 | OECD (2022)

As education systems around the world seek to redefine the role of HWB in schooling, international reports such as the OECD's *Making Physical Education Dynamic and Inclusive for 2030* provide valuable insight into how curriculum design is evolving. This comparative analysis—based on the practices of 18 countries including Scotland—highlights the increasing recognition of physical and health education (PHE) as essential to the holistic development of young people. It captures emerging global themes such as inclusion, learner agency, and integration of HWB across curricular boundaries, offering a broader lens through which national reform efforts can be contextualised.

This thematic report is the OECD's first comparative policy analysis focused specifically on physical and health education (PHE) across 18 countries and outlines emerging trends in curriculum design.

- Whole-child development- PE is framed not just as a vehicle for fitness, but as a contributor to mental, emotional and social wellbeing. The report argues for integrating PHE into broader wellbeing strategies within schools.
- Curriculum reform and innovation- Countries are rethinking traditional models of PHE to make them more inclusive, dynamic, and responsive to diverse learner needs. This includes interdisciplinary approaches and links to citizenship, sustainability, and digital wellbeing.
- Equity and inclusion- The report identifies disparities in access and participation, especially among girls, disabled learners, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Inclusive curriculum design is seen as essential to addressing these gaps.
- Evidence gaps and policy challenges- Despite growing interest, the report notes a lack of robust comparative data and research on effective PHE practices. It calls for stronger evaluation frameworks and cross-sector collaboration.
- Scotland's contribution- Scotland is one of the jurisdictions featured in the study, with input from national experts. Its approach to wellbeing, learner voice, and curriculum flexibility is highlighted as part of the international dialogue.

The OECD's exploration of PHE affirms that HWB in schools is no longer peripheral—it is a central dimension of 21st-century learning. Scotland's involvement in this international dialogue strengthens its commitment to inclusive and responsive curriculum design. As global education systems prioritise dynamic, equitable, and evidence-informed approaches to HWB, Scotland's CIC can continue to benefit from shared insights and collaborative innovation.

3.2 A Call to Action: The Second Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing (2025)

“When the music changes, so must the dance.” —Hausa proverb (West Africa)

Recent international studies, including key findings from the *Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and wellbeing*, present a complex and evolving picture of global health challenges facing adolescents. These reports highlight multi-dimensional trends that are relevant to national curriculum development.

By 2030, over one billion adolescents are projected to live in countries burdened by multiple overlapping health issues—including communicable diseases, malnutrition, and injury. Simultaneously, there is a sharp rise in non-communicable conditions such as obesity and mental health disorders, with overweight and obese youth expected to exceed 460 million worldwide. Mental health alone is projected to account for 42 million lost years of healthy life globally.

- Despite rising needs, progress in reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) remains negligible, with no region currently on track to meet targets. The impact of these conditions is particularly significant among female adolescents, who also face disproportionate levels of anaemia and educational exclusion.
- Global data reveals persistent and widening health inequalities, exacerbated by underinvestment in adolescent wellbeing. Although young people make up over a quarter of the global population, they receive less than 3% of development assistance for health. These disparities are compounded by rising rates of adolescents not in education, employment, or training (NEET), with projected global averages of 30.8% for females and 19.3% for males by 2030.
- Alongside these health-specific concerns, broader systemic issues shape adolescent wellbeing. Climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and displacement are increasingly recognised as major risks to human progress and planetary stability. The erosion of sexual and reproductive health rights in some regions further disrupts positive development trajectories for young people.
- Governance failures and fragmented international responses are also identified as contributing to adverse outcomes. Weak coordination, insufficient accountability, and siloed approaches are seen as limiting the effectiveness of global efforts to address interconnected crises.

These findings reflect the dynamic and interdependent nature of adolescent health and wellbeing across social, environmental, and economic domains. They contribute important context to ongoing national education reform conversations in Scotland and underscore the relevance of international perspectives in the CIC.

3.3 Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children OECD(2020)

International research compiled by the OECD and WHO highlights significant patterns in child and adolescent physical health that have implications for curriculum design. Over recent decades, many OECD countries have seen improvements in health outcomes—including lower rates of accidental injuries, smoking, alcohol use, and pregnancy and parenthood in young people. However, persistent challenges remain, notably declining physical activity levels and rising obesity among children and young people.

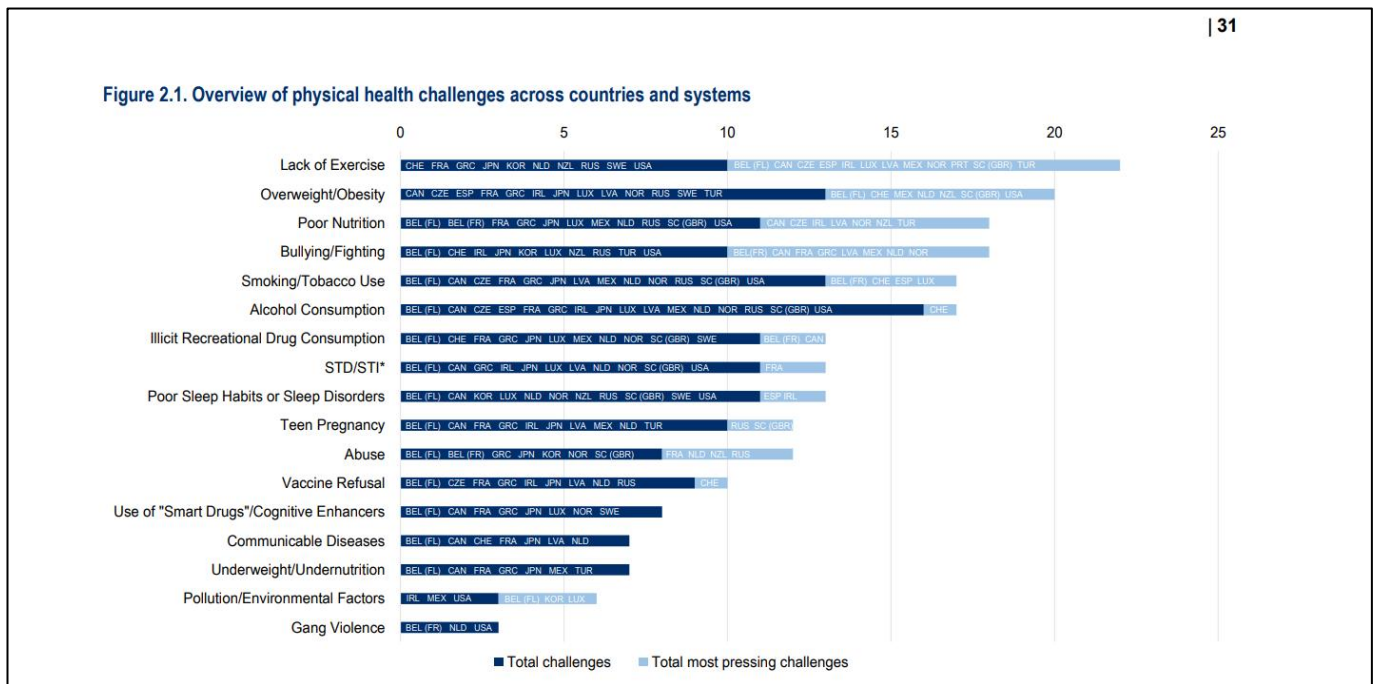


Figure 13 – Overview of physical health challenges across countries and systems

- Obesity has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes, with higher risk observed among female adolescents. Contributing factors include increased consumption of ultra-processed, energy-dense foods and limited access to nutritious diets. UNICEF notes a global imbalance in childhood nutrition, with many children consuming too much of what they don't need and too little of what they do.
- Sleep quality is also a concern. Survey data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC 2021-22) study found that nearly a quarter of respondents reported difficulty falling asleep—alongside high levels of nervousness and irritability.
- Stable levels of cannabis use contrast with declines in smoking and drinking, while violence, bullying, and discrimination remain significant risks, particularly for children from marginalised groups.
- Health outcomes vary by gender and age. While boys tend to be more physically active, they are also more likely to be overweight.
- Socioeconomic status plays a major role in shaping health behaviours; children from wealthier households are more likely to have consistent mealtime routines and healthier diets, while deprivation and lower parental education are linked to poorer health indicators.

- Supportive relationships also matter. Positive social connections and a sense of belonging are associated with better self-reported health, whereas loneliness and social isolation correlate with increased mental health challenges and even premature mortality.
- Education itself is recognised as a key determinant of health. It can mitigate the effects of disadvantage and promote healthier behaviours.
- Effective interventions typically involve parents and caregivers, promote a health-focused school culture, and use coordinated approaches that span health and education sectors.
- Multi-behaviour strategies—such as addressing both physical activity and diet—alongside digital delivery methods are shown to enhance effectiveness and reach.
- International frameworks like the WHO’s *Health Promoting Schools* model emphasise the importance of whole-school approaches to wellbeing, advocating for integration of health literacy, positive social environments, and community collaboration as part of everyday school practice.

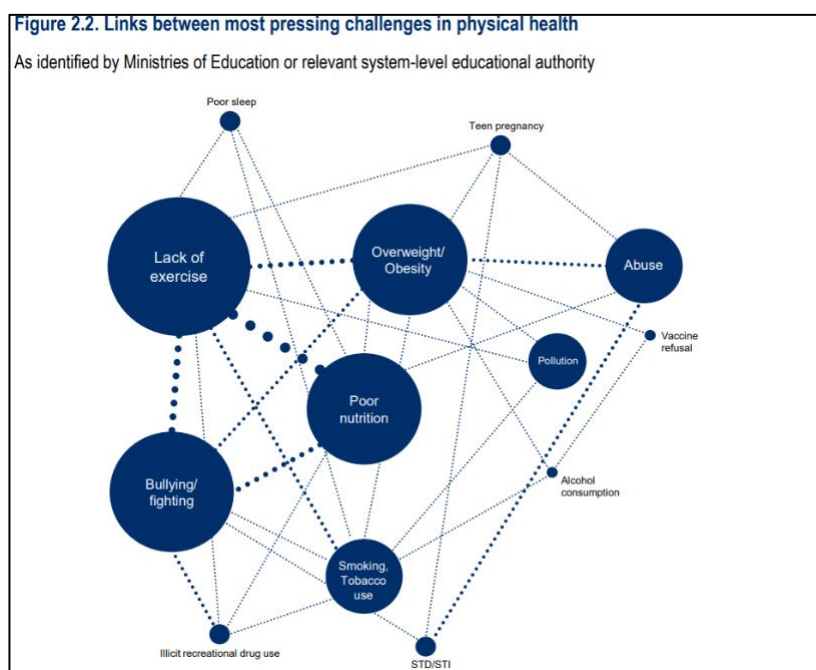


Figure 14 – Links between most pressing challenges in physical health

3.4 Programme for International Student Assessment

Student Wellbeing in PISA (2022)

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 highlights the critical role of HWB in shaping educational outcomes across participating nations. The findings underscore the importance of embedding mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing into whole-school approaches, with positive school climates and supportive relationships linked to improved academic performance and life satisfaction.

Key Insights from OECD Research in Scotland

- Integrating HWB into curricula enhances student engagement and achievement.
- Supportive peer, teacher, and family relationships foster resilience and belonging.
- Regular physical activity and healthy meals contribute to better health and learning outcomes.

Life Satisfaction

- Scottish average score rose from 6.25 (2018) to 6.48 (2022), still below OECD average of 6.75.
- 55.9% of Scottish students rated their satisfaction at 7 or higher, compared to 61.4% OECD-wide.
- Strong predictors: family relationships, school experience, health, and self-image.

Sense of Belonging

- Improvement since 2018; fewer students felt like outsiders.
- Loneliness levels were lower than OECD average, though belonging remained mixed.

Classroom Climate

- 59.9% of students praised teacher enthusiasm (above OECD average).
- 77.4% felt supported and believed teachers enjoyed teaching them.
- Digital distractions were more prevalent than UK average; safety in class flagged as a concern.

Safety and Bullying

- Perceived safety at school was higher than OECD average.
- Bullying rates slightly elevated (10.6% vs. 9.4% OECD), with links to truancy and wellbeing.
- More students witnessed vandalism and fights, but fewer reported gang or weapon exposure.

Truancy

- 39.2% skipped school at least once in previous two weeks—above OECD norms.
- Truancy negatively correlated with academic performance and wellbeing.

Family Engagement

- Students with regular family interactions (e.g. shared meals, discussions) performed better in maths and reported stronger emotional support.

The PISA 2022 findings indicate that student wellbeing—including life satisfaction, sense of belonging, classroom environment, safety, and family engagement—is linked to educational outcomes across OECD countries. Scotland's results show improvements in several wellbeing indicators compared to 2018, while also identifying areas that remain below OECD averages.

These international bodies of evidence reflect the multifaceted nature of child and adolescent health, shaped by social, economic, behavioural, and environmental factors. Patterns in physical activity, nutrition, sleep, substance use, relationships, and educational context underscore the importance of comprehensive, coordinated efforts to support health and wellbeing. These insights offer a broad foundation for understanding international approaches to HWB curriculum and inform ongoing conversations around curriculum improvement.

4 Education Scotland Evidence

4.1 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) Evidence and Reports

Between January and June 2024, an analysis of 74 HMI reports—conducted within agreed parameters to ensure the scope remained manageable—reveals a consistent pattern of effective practice and emerging strengths in the delivery of HWB across Scottish schools. These inspection findings highlight a collective drive to embed mental, emotional, social, and physical health into the everyday experiences of learners. Alongside structured curriculum planning and strong partnerships, schools are increasingly aligning HWB initiatives with their values and ethos. Based on the emerging HWB themes identified in the reports reviewed, a summary of inspection findings has been collated and presented in the following section. Key areas for improvement, as highlighted by the Inspectorate, are also outlined to support ongoing curriculum development.

Care Inspectorate reports have not been included at this stage due to the ongoing development of a new joint inspection programme. This plan introduces a refreshed approach to multi-agency scrutiny and improvement support, which is still in progress. Once the updated framework and findings are fully implemented and published, they will provide a more comprehensive basis for inclusion in future curriculum evidence papers.

4.1.1 Emphasis on Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

Many schools focus on supporting learner's' emotional health by integrating mental wellbeing into lesson planning across all subjects (RoA). Teachers provide structured opportunities for students to understand and manage their emotions, helping them develop self-awareness and emotional regulation skills. Programmes like "Mental Health Ambassadors" and "Mentors in Violence Prevention" also encourage students to support peers' mental health.

"Teachers plan for health and wellbeing using a progressive learning pathway. This helps teachers provide learning experiences which build on children's prior learning. Children learn about healthy eating, managing risks, and how to develop and manage friendships and relationships. Children across the school learn about self-control, emotional awareness, and interpersonal problem solving through a wellbeing programme. As a result, children are becoming more confident in recognising, talking about and managing their emotions."

HMI report 2024

"A few young people in the senior phase develop their leadership skills through involvement in wellbeing programmes. These include as Mentors in Violence Prevention and Mental Health Ambassadors." HMI report 2024

"They (staff) work well with a range of partners to develop children's emotional, social and physical wellbeing." HMI report 2024

“...Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) mentors and they support the Rights Respecting School approaches. This is resulting in young people who have a strong sense of citizenship and duty to support others.” HMI report 2024

4.1.2 Physical Education

Consistent emphasis on physical health is evident through the provision of PE lessons. Schools are encouraged to ensure that students receive at least two hours of PE each week and participate in various physical activities outside of regular PE classes, promoting active lifestyles. Partnerships with Active Schools enhance learners’ physical health and wellbeing.

“Children receive their full entitlement to two hours’ high-quality physical education each week. Teachers make very effective use of indoor and outdoor school and community spaces to deliver a progressive, engaging programme of physical education.” HMI report, 2024

4.1.3 Well-Structured PSE Programmes

PSE that is planned with and for the learners is praised as good practice that leads to better understanding. Content that is relevant to the school and its context both supports learners’ wellbeing and the development of their HWB knowledge.

“Young people feel confident about making informed choices about their health and wellbeing. PSE in S1-S6 is relevant, well-structured and current to the context of the school.” HMI report 2024

“Young people benefit from a vibrant, relevant and responsive PSHE programme, ensuring they are well informed to make positive and safer choices. Young people have contributed to the development of the PSHE programme. Pupils negotiated the inclusion of learning about mental health and dealing with poverty. Young people demonstrate outstanding knowledge and understanding of personal and social education.” HMI report 2024

4.1.4 Progressive Curriculum Development

Teachers are working towards building a progressive HWB curriculum, often using local authority progression frameworks and wellbeing indicators. Schools are encouraged to develop progressive HWB planners to ensure students experience a well-rounded HWB curriculum over time.

“Staff pay very good attention to learners’ health and wellbeing through progressive opportunities at all stages to engage in a wide range of activities and physical pursuits.” HMI report 2024

4.1.5 Integration with School Values and Ethos

The HWB curriculum is aligned with broader school values, such as fostering a nurturing environment. Schools emphasise values like “healthy, hardworking, caring, and kind,” which contribute to a positive school culture and reinforce wellbeing as part of the school’s ethos.

“The school’s values of ‘healthy, hardworking, caring and kind’ contribute well to the calm and nurturing culture across the school.” HMI report, 2024

4.1.6 Community and Partnerships

Collaboration with community partners, parents, and external agencies plays a key role in enhancing health and wellbeing. Events like health weeks and community gatherings offer additional resources and support for both students and their families, fostering a holistic approach to wellbeing.

“...Introduction of SCQF level 5 health care and energy courses to meet local demands. Most young people are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle through physical exercise.” HMI report, 2024

4.1.7 Focus on Inclusion, Diversity, and Citizenship

Schools encourage an understanding of diversity, relationships, and tolerance. Topics like equality, diversity, and safeguarding are often included in the curriculum, especially in Personal and Social Education (PSE) for older students. Through initiatives like Rights Respecting School programmes, students gain a sense of citizenship and learn about supporting others.

“Children have a strong understanding of how school values, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and wellbeing indicators support their rights and wellbeing. Staff care deeply about children and families and have high aspirations for every child.” HMI Inspection Report, 2024

4.2 Challenges in the Implementation of the HWB Curriculum from HMI Reports

4.2.1 Need to Develop Coherent HWB Pathways

Several of the inspection reports advise that schools should consider how teachers are tracking HWB curriculum, and this should be done in a planned and systematic manner.

“Children need more opportunities to learn about all aspects of the health and wellbeing curriculum in a progressive manner. This should include food and nutrition and social and emotional health and wellbeing.” HMI report, 2024

4.2.2 Relevant PSE Programme for Secondary Pupils

Feedback from HMI Inspectors mentions the need for relevant, and even better, pupil-led PSE programmes to meet the HWB needs of the learners.

“School staff should now work together to consider how to make further progress with ...health and wellbeing as a Responsibility of All. Young people do not currently benefit from a progressive and relevant PSE programme.” HMI report, 2024

4.2.3 Responsibility of All (RoA)

In some inspection reports, the lack of a consistent understanding and approach to RoA was highlighted.

“Senior leaders should develop the confidence of all teachers in understanding their responsibility for promoting health and wellbeing. Young people reflect on their own mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing in health and wellbeing classes, assemblies and, increasingly through other classes.” HMI report, 2024

The HMI reports reviewed showcase how some Scottish schools approach HWB, with many embracing comprehensive, inclusive, and values-led strategies that place pupil health and wellbeing at the heart of learning. While several challenges remain—particularly in achieving coherent progression across all stages and strengthening the consistency of PSE and RoA practices—the evidence suggests a sector actively reflecting, adapting, and investing in sustainable HWB curriculum planning.

4.3 Education Scotland Reports and Evidence

A range of reports and evaluations published by Education Scotland have been considered and analysed to inform this section. These include thematic inspections, curriculum impact reports, guidance documents, and practitioner insights relevant to the HWB curriculum. By synthesising findings across these sources, this section identifies key strengths, recurring challenges, and proposed strategic priorities for practice and policy improvement.

4.3.1 Health and wellbeing: The Responsibility of All 3-18 Curriculum Impact Report (2017)

Education Scotland's review of HWB as a RoA highlights a range of strengths and areas for improvement across Scottish schools. The evidence suggests a sector-wide commitment to fostering inclusive, supportive environments that place learner health and wellbeing at the heart of school life. Through strategic leadership, restorative practices, and collaborative partnerships, schools are making significant progress. However, the analysis also uncovers persistent challenges that must be addressed to ensure more equitable and impactful delivery of HWB provision.

- Culture of inclusion- Learners' views are valued, and they actively contribute to planning improvements in HWB. There is a strong focus on the 'learners' voice' in terms of content, methodology, and approach to health and wellbeing.
- Restorative and supportive Approaches- Many schools adopt restorative, solutions-oriented approaches to behaviour management, creating a supportive ethos and positive relationships conducive to learning.
- Health and wellbeing as a priority- HWB are considered a priority at all levels, driving achievement and reducing inequality. Strong leadership and strategic planning are in place.
- Partnership working- There is a strong culture of partnership with agencies and services that support the HWB of children, young people, and families, especially those most vulnerable.
- Quality assurance and reflection- Opportunities for discussion, reflection, and review are planned, involving all stakeholders, and informing future health and wellbeing plans.

Areas for Development

- Secondary school students want more opportunities to influence what and how they learn about HWB.
- HWB is not always adequately addressed in personal learning planning or evaluated consistently across schools.
- There is a need for greater awareness among some parents and learners about the importance of mental, emotional, and social wellbeing.
- More family-based support is needed, especially for young parents to improve their own health and wellbeing.
- Many health and wellbeing events are one-off activities with limited follow-up. Health initiatives should be more systematically planned throughout the academic year.

- Support and resources are not always effectively directed towards those with the greatest need.
- here is a need to strengthen support for HWB during transitions, both within schools and across schools, ensuring continuity of care and information.
- There is a need for more effective evaluation of HWB programs, with a focus on measuring their impact on learners' progress.

This analysis reflects the growing emphasis on holistic HWB as a catalyst for learner success and community resilience. While schools demonstrate commendable progress in areas such as inclusion, strategic planning, and partnership working, further improvements are needed to ensure consistency, relevance, and sustainability. Strengthening learner voice in secondary settings, embedding HWB in planning, and enhancing evaluation mechanisms are suggested as key to closing existing gaps and advancing HWB outcomes for all children and young people.

4.3.2 Thematic Inspection of Personal and Social Education (PSE) and Health and Wellbeing Report (2018)

Education Scotland's 2018 thematic inspection of PSE provides critical insight into the strengths and challenges surrounding HWB across Scotland's schools. It underscores the importance of well-structured, learner-responsive curricula and affirms that effective PSE is foundational to fostering inclusion, resilience, and emotional wellbeing. By centring pupil voice, addressing diversity, and supporting mental health, the report guides educators in shaping experiences that are not only meaningful but transformative.

- PSE/HWB programmes must be well-planned, progressive, and relevant to learners' needs across all stages—from early years to senior phase.
- There is inconsistency in delivery, especially in secondary schools, where learners report repetition and lack of progression.
- Schools should ensure age-appropriate and stage-relevant content, particularly in areas like sexual consent, mental health, and relationships.
- Learner engagement is essential: children and young people should be involved in shaping the content and delivery of PSE/HWB.
- Co-design leads to more meaningful learning and better alignment with learners' lived experiences.
- PSE/HWB should promote understanding of diversity, equality, and prejudice, helping learners respect and support different groups.
- There is a need for consistent teaching of equalities issues across all settings.
- Schools must actively promote positive mental health, identify issues early, and provide access to appropriate support—including counselling services.
- There is variation in availability and quality of mental health support across schools.
- Effective pastoral care and staged intervention are crucial for supporting learners' emotional and behavioural needs.
- Schools should ensure universal support entitlements are consistently delivered and evaluated.
- There is a need for better tracking of learner progress in HWB using wellbeing indicators and national benchmarks.

- Evaluation should focus on impact and outcomes, not just activity.

The findings call for a renewed focus on consistency, relevance, and holistic support across all educational settings. To raise standards in HWB, schools must ensure age-appropriate progression, robust pastoral care, and inclusive practices that reflect learners' realities.

4.3.3 Health and wellbeing Across Learning: Responsibilities of all Principles and Practice

Curriculum for Excellence: responsibility of all practitioners (Education Scotland, 2017) document clearly sets out what RoA in HWB means. Everyone within each learning community, whatever their contact with children and young people may be, shares the responsibility for creating a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust – one in which everyone can make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of everyone within the school and the wider community.

There are many ways in which establishments can assist young people:

- Establish open, positive, and supportive relationships across the school community.
- Ensure children and young people feel listened to and able to discuss sensitive aspects of their lives.
- Promote a climate where learners feel safe and secure.
- Model behaviours that support health and wellbeing and encourage others to do the same.
- Use learning and teaching methodologies that promote effective learning
- Be sensitive and responsive to the health and wellbeing needs of each individual child and young person.

Practical responsibilities include understanding of anti-discriminatory, anti-bullying, and child protection policies by all staff and knowledge of the steps to be taken in any given situation, including appropriate referral (Education Scotland, 2017).

This section highlights the shared responsibility all practitioners have in fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment that supports every learner's health and wellbeing. It illustrates how everyday actions, relationships, and safeguarding practices are integral to delivering the HWB curriculum effectively.

4.3.4 Health and Wellbeing: A Thematic Review – A Report by HM Inspectors (March 2022)

Almost all establishments are taking significant strides to enhance the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people, and their families. A growing number of schools have adopted structured, whole-school approaches that foster nurturing environments and strengthen positive relationships. These initiatives often incorporate the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to promote learners' understanding of their rights. Many schools have created safe and supportive spaces to help learners develop emotional and social resilience, with staff using nurture profiles to assess the needs of each class. These profiles inform the development of targeted health and wellbeing programmes,

enabling a more personalised and proactive approach. Overall, schools are evolving their HWB curricula to deliver more meaningful and holistic learning experiences that actively support pupils' mental, emotional, and social development.

4.3.5 Raising the Bar in core Physical Education: Education Scotland 2019

The *Raising the Bar in Core Physical Education* report from Education Scotland (2019) sets a clear vision for high-quality PE as an essential component of Scotland's HWB curriculum. It emphasises that all learners are entitled to progressive, inclusive, and purposeful PE experiences that support their mental, emotional, social and physical development. Delivered by qualified educators, core PE is positioned not simply as physical activity but as a structured learning pathway integral to lifelong wellbeing and educational achievement.

- **Quality Physical Education Is Foundational**– Core PE should be planned, progressive, and inclusive, delivered by GTCS-registered teachers during the timetabled school day. It must focus on learning, not just activity—developing transferable skills for life, learning, and work.
- **Enjoyment and Engagement Matter**– Learners should find PE challenging, motivating, and rewarding. Enjoyment is seen as a driver of participation and personal growth.
- **Diverse and Purposeful Activities**– Pupils should experience a wide range of physical activities: competitive, cooperative, creative, indoor/outdoor, and adaptable formats. This diversity supports both physical literacy and emotional wellbeing.
- **Progression Through Collaboration**– Teachers should engage in professional dialogue and collaborative planning, including moderation of assessment evidence. This ensures seamless progression from early years to senior phase.
- **Partnerships Enhance Impact**– Collaboration with Active Schools Coordinators, coaches, and volunteers enriches the PE experience. However, teachers retain responsibility for planning and learning outcomes.
- **Assessment and Reflection**– Learners should be supported to understand how much and how well they've learned and be involved in planning their next steps. Emphasis is placed on evaluating, analysing, and problem-solving within PE contexts.
- **Significant Aspects of Learning**– Movement skills and physical fitness. Cognitive and personal qualities (e.g. resilience, leadership, self-esteem). Social competencies like cooperation and respect.

Collectively, these principles highlight the vital role of core PE in nurturing confident, resilient, and health-literate young people. By focusing on quality, inclusion, learner engagement, and collaborative practice, Scottish educators are encouraged to elevate PE from a timetabled subject to a transformative tool that enriches every aspect of school life. Continued reflection, professional learning, and strategic partnerships will be key to driving consistency and meaningful impact across all levels of practice.

4.4 Curriculum Improvement Cycle Pilot Reviews

The HWB Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) began in February 2023 with a clear focus on reviewing and refining the HWB curriculum in Scotland. The initiative brought together over 80 practitioners to collaboratively explore and address the challenges and opportunities within the current HWB framework. This section provides an overview of the work undertaken to date, the insights gained, and the next steps for this pivotal project.

4.4.1 Pilot Curriculum Review Process (2023–2024)

The review process was launched with a national event involving more than 80 practitioners from across Scotland. This engagement was designed to gather diverse perspectives and insights into the HWB curriculum. Key outputs from this event included:

- The identification of strengths and challenges within the current framework.
- Co-design of a detailed work plan by a core group of self-nominated practitioners.

The core group further refined this work plan, undertaking a comprehensive review of the technical framework to assess its fitness for purpose. Over 18 months, this collaborative effort provided a strong foundation for shaping the CIC work.

4.4.2 Pilot Event Design

The event incorporated evidence-based and service design principles to foster high levels of engagement. Key activities included:

- Diamond 9 Activity- Participants identified and prioritised key components of the HWB curriculum to determine essential knowledge, skills, and attributes learners need to thrive now and in the future.
- Themed Group Discussions- Delegates were grouped based on common themes from the Diamond 9 activity, facilitating in-depth exploration and development of these themes.
- Carousel Activity- Delegates reviewed and added to the work of other groups, ensuring broad input and refinement.

4.4.3 Engagement and Feedback

Feedback highlighted high levels of satisfaction and engagement:

- Activity 1-100% rated as good or very good.
- Activity 2- 90% rated as good or very good.
- Activity 3- 78% rated as good or very good.

Practitioners expressed a strong interest in ongoing involvement, with many appreciating the collaborative and purpose-driven nature of the event.

4.4.4 Core Group Formation

Following the event, a Core Group of 13 practitioners was formed to review outputs, evaluate findings, and plan the next steps. Over the next 18 months, this group met on a number of occasions and co-designed a detailed work plan, assessed the technical framework, and laid the foundation for the broader Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

The initial phase of the HWB CIC demonstrated a strong foundation of collaborative practice, practitioner-led enquiry, and evidence-informed reflection. Through inclusive national engagement and strategic design, the process surfaced valuable insights and built momentum for further evolution of the HWB curriculum. As the CIC moves forward, continued practitioner involvement, robust evaluation, and adaptive planning will be employed to ensure a coherent, responsive, and future-focused framework curriculum that meets the evolving needs of Scotland's learners.

The evidence from HMI inspections, Education Scotland publications, and curriculum improvement cycle pilot reviews offers a robust and multi-layered view of HWB in Scottish schools. The evidence presented highlights examples of successful approaches and identifies opportunities for growth within the CIC.

5 Stakeholder Reports and Reviews

5.1 Key Stakeholder Reports

This section summarises recent evidence from a selected range of national stakeholder reports that collectively offer insight into the HWB curriculum in Scotland. Given the breadth and complexity of the HWB curriculum, it has only been possible to include national-level sources for this paper. It is acknowledged that there are many key stakeholders operating across this landscape, including local authorities, professional bodies, and community organisations. However, for the purposes of this evidence paper, the focus is on contributions from NHS Scotland, Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Government commissioned reports, SHINE (Scottish Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network), Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit and Sport Scotland. These sources highlight areas of strength and concern across mental health, substance use, nutrition, sexual health, and physical activity, and provide a valuable evidence base for shaping curriculum content that promotes equity and supports positive outcomes in line with national priorities.

5.1.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing

HBSC Scotland Study (University of Glasgow, n.d.) shows rising anxiety and mental health concerns among adolescents, especially post-COVID. It tracks trends in bullying, cyberbullying, life satisfaction, and school-related stress.

Scottish Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network (SHINE) Pilot Study (Scottish Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network [SHINE], n.d.) supports schools in using health data to inform wellbeing planning. It promotes a whole-school approach and highlights the importance of data literacy among staff.

5.1.2 Substance Use and Risk Behaviours

Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS, 2018). reveals patterns in smoking, alcohol, and drug use among S2 and S4 pupils. It also explores attitudes, sources of substances, and links to mental wellbeing.

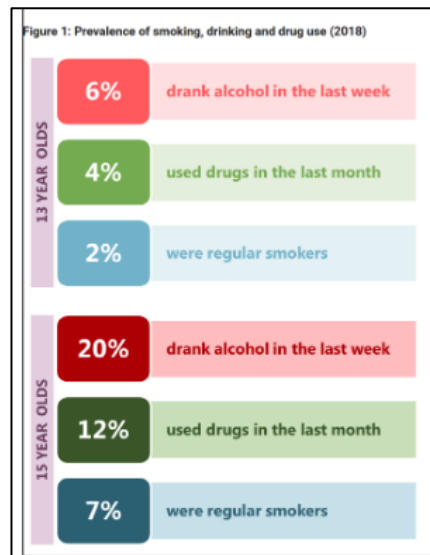


Figure 15

Findings show that while overall substance use is declining, multiple substance use and early exposure remain concerns, especially in more deprived areas.

Police Scotland, in partnership with the charity, I Am Me Scotland, plays an active role in supporting delivery of the HWB curriculum in schools through PSE. Together, they have developed the *I Am Me Scotland* Learning Platform, a free, school-facing resource that promotes inclusive, trauma-informed learning across key areas such as mental health, exploitation and grooming, hate crime, disability awareness, substance misuse, and children's rights under the UNCRC. Materials include animated lessons, real-life case studies, and classroom activities tailored to pupils' age and stage. Notably, the *You Are Not Alone* resource launched in 2024 provides S1+ pupils with tools for recognising and responding to child exploitation.

5.1.3 Food, Nutrition and Inequality

The Public Health Nutrition Strategy (Food Standards Scotland, 2023) calls for a healthier, more sustainable food environment. It emphasises reducing diet-related inequalities and improving access to nutritious food across socioeconomic groups.

The Ingredients for Success survey (Glasgow Caledonian University, 2023) highlights barriers to practical food education, such as cost and stigma. It advocates for cost-free access to ingredients and better support for food education in schools.

5.1.4 Teenage Pregnancy

Public Health Scotland's *Teenage Pregnancy Report* (Public Health Scotland, 2022) shows a continued decline in rates, but stark inequalities persist. Young people in the most deprived areas are five times more likely to experience pregnancy than those in the least deprived.

5.1.5 Physical Activity

NHS guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily for children aged 5–18 (NHS, 2021). Activities should support bone and muscle strength, and sedentary time should be minimised.

These findings can inform curriculum planning, especially in areas like:

- Mental health education and resilience-building.
- Substance misuse prevention.
- Equitable access to food education and nutrition.
- Sexual health and relationships.
- Promoting active lifestyles and reducing health inequalities.

Two recent reports from Sport Scotland provide valuable insights into how these priorities are being addressed through school and community-based initiatives. *The Sport for Life 2024 Annual Review* details the national reach of the Active Schools programme, which supported more than 275,000 participants in sessions during 2023–2024. It emphasises the programme’s role in promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in physical activity across Scotland’s education settings. Additionally, *The Equality and Sport Research 2024* report highlights barriers to participation faced by underrepresented groups, including children from low-income households, those with mental health challenges, and ethnically diverse communities. The findings support targeted interventions and curriculum adaptations that reflect learners’ lived experiences and promote equitable access.

These reports underscore the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach to HWB education that reflects the realities of young people across Scotland. They suggest the need for targeted interventions in areas of inequality and advocate for stronger support around emotional wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, and access to practical learning. These insights are relevant for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle process, supporting the HWB curriculum to evolve in ways that are evidence-led, responsive, and impactful.

Organisation	Relevant HWB Reports / Resources
NHS Scotland	Physical activity guidelines NHS inform
Public Health Scotland	Care and Wellbeing Dashboard (2023) Public Health Scotland Annual Report 2021–2022
Police Scotland	Strategic Collaboration with Public Health Scotland (2021) I Am Me Scotland - Disability, Hate Crime, Disability, Charity
Scottish Government Commissioned Reports	Scottish Health Survey Collection (2008–2023) Scotland’s Census 2022 – Health, Disability and Unpaid Care
SHINE (Scottish Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network)	SHINE Network Website – University of Glasgow Explore Scotland’s Young People’s Health – SHINE Data Explorer
Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU)	Ingredients for Success Report – SPIRU & Food Teachers Centre (2023)
Sport Scotland	Sport for Life 2024 – Annual Review Equality and Sport Research 2024
University of Glasgow	University of Glasgow - Schools - School of Health & Wellbeing - Research - MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit - Research - Complexity in health - Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Scotland Study

5.2 Subject Associations

This section highlights the contributions of three voluntary, teacher-led organisations. The Scottish Association of Teachers of Physical Education (SATPE), Home Economics Association of Teachers (HEAT), and the Scottish Guidance Association (SGA) all play a vital role in supporting the HWB curriculum in Scotland. Led by practising educators who volunteer their time, these groups actively promote professional learning, drive resource development, and amplify practitioner voice within their specialist areas.

SATPE plays a role in the PE components of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. By connecting primary and secondary PE teachers, SATPE promotes structured, progressive learning, provides professional development through conferences and workshops, and facilitates collaboration and dialogue among educators to support delivery of high-quality, inclusive PE experiences. This ongoing professional support aims to align directly with the HWB curriculum, ensuring teachers are well-equipped to foster learners' mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing through effective pedagogy and resources.

Meanwhile, the Home Economics Association of Teachers (HEAT)—established as part of recent efforts to strengthen the role of home economics in schools—supports HWB by advocating for comprehensive food and health education. HEAT brings together teachers, industry professionals, and partner organisations (e.g. *Food a Fact of Life*) to deliver training, guidance, and resource-sharing events, such as the conference held at Abertay University in November 2024. Through these activities, HEAT enhances educational practice in areas of food literacy, nutrition, and broader health education, supporting the HWB curriculum's objectives.

The Scottish Guidance Association (SGA) supports the HWB curriculum by enhancing professional learning, promoting good practice in pastoral care, and advocating for learner-centred approaches. Through collaboration with national partners, the SGA helps schools develop effective guidance strategies around mental health, PSE and positive relationships. It also plays a role in curriculum development by representing guidance staff in national discussions and sharing resources that ensure wellbeing support is consistent, inclusive, and evidence-informed.

These organisations contribute to the ongoing development and delivery of HWB education by supporting professional learning, resource sharing, and subject-specific collaboration among educators. Their collective efforts—undertaken voluntarily and rooted in classroom experience—help shape inclusive, evidence-aware practice. Although they have not produced formal publications for this paper, their contributions remain pivotal to the aims of the CIC, and representatives from these organisations sit in the HWB CIC groups.

5.3 Professional Associations

While specific curriculum-focused evidence from professional associations and teacher unions is not available for inclusion in this section, it is important to acknowledge that organisations such as the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS), Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), and the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) regularly publish a wide range of valuable materials. These include national surveys and reports on mental health in schools, staff wellbeing, and learner support, as well as targeted resources. Representatives from several of these organisations continue to shape ongoing curriculum development through active participation in the HWB CIC including the Core, Collaboration, and Steering groups.

5.4 Children and Young People's Perspectives

Children and young people's perspectives are embedded throughout this evidence paper, recognising their vital role in shaping the HWB curriculum. Their lived experiences, priorities, and ideas have informed key themes across the document. However, it is important to dedicate this section specifically to children and young people's views on defined aspects of the HWB curriculum—such as mental health, relationships, nutrition, and digital wellbeing—to highlight the areas they identify as most relevant to their lives and learning. A sample of some of the most recent and relevant reports have been selected from [CYP's Evidence Bank](#). These insights help ensure the curriculum remains responsive, inclusive, and grounded in the voices of those it serves.

[The Digital Wellbeing report](#) by WhoCares? Scotland (2022) highlights the importance of digital safety, rights, and relationships for care-experienced young people. It reveals gaps in knowledge around online safety and digital rights and calls for schools to provide more structured support and education in these areas. Participants expressed a desire for trusted adults and professionals to help navigate online risks, suggesting that digital wellbeing should be more explicitly integrated into HWB education (WhoCares? Scotland, 2019).

The [Life at Age 14 Report](#) from the *Growing Up in Scotland study* (2022) provides a broad snapshot of adolescent health and wellbeing. It shows that while many young people report positive relationships and life satisfaction, a substantial proportion experience bullying, mental health challenges, and body image concerns. These findings support the case for a curriculum that fosters emotional resilience, promotes positive relationships, and addresses body image and mental health in a meaningful way (Scottish Government, 2022).

Findings from [The Education Report 2023 by LGBT Youth Scotland](#) indicate that young people have a desire for increased access to supportive staff, more respectful and inclusive learning environments, and enhanced provision of LGBTI-specific information within the curriculum. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of inclusive policies and consistent guidance to support equitable practice across educational settings (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2023).

The [10,000 Voices Consultation](#) (Action Dumfries and Galloway Council, 2023) captures the views of over 10,000 young people aged 10–25. Key issues identified include smoking and vaping, mental health, bullying, diet, and the cost of living. Young people also expressed a desire for more support and information on these topics. The findings suggest that the health and wellbeing curriculum should be co-designed with learners and reflect their lived experiences, particularly in relation to social inequalities and access to support (Action Dumfries and Galloway Council, 2023).

[The National Discussion on Education](#) (Campbell & Harris, 2023) places strong emphasis on the centrality of learners' wellbeing in shaping Scotland's future education system. It highlights the need for a more holistic approach to learning—one that prioritises mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing alongside academic achievement. The report reinforces the importance of embedding HWB across all aspects of the curriculum, calling for greater collaboration among

educators, health professionals, and communities to support young people's development and life chances.

The findings from these reports call for a HWB curriculum that reflects the lived realities of children and young people in Scotland. They highlight the importance of co-designing learning experiences, addressing inequalities, and embedding inclusive approaches that support diverse identities and needs.

6 Academic Research

A comprehensive and systematically curated list of research sources was developed through a collaborative effort between the Education Scotland HWB Curriculum team, the Education Scotland Data, Performance and Research (DPR) Team, and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This collaboration ensured a comprehensive and detailed level of expertise in the identification, evaluation, and organisation of relevant literature. A dedicated research database has been established to house these sources, with each document catalogued alongside direct access links and annotated with its relevance to the HWB curriculum. This structured approach facilitates ease of access and supports evidence-informed decision-making in curriculum development. Furthermore, as the research process progressed, emerging gaps within the original research parameters were also identified and systematically recorded in the same database. These documented gaps may inform future research priorities and provide direction, if further inquiry is required to strengthen the evidence base underpinning the HWB curriculum. This paper does not present an exhaustive review of all available literature in the field of HWB; rather, it offers a curated selection of brief commentaries on key studies and reports, that have been identified as particularly relevant to current curricular priorities and practice from 2014.

A Rapid Research Review has also been undertaken by the DPR team and will be published in parallel with this paper to complement its findings and evidence base.

6.1 Mental, Emotional, Social and Physical Health (MESP)

Research (University of Glasgow, n.d.) consistently highlights the importance of integrating mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing into educational settings. Studies endorse approaches such as mindfulness and social and emotional learning (SEL) to support learner development, though practical implementation varies widely. Inclusive practices, learner agency, and interdisciplinary methods remain key to effective delivery (Scottish Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network [SHINE], n.d.).

6.2 Planning for Choices and Change (PCC)

Findings support the integration of career education within HWB, beginning in early years and primary settings. Experiential and agency-focused learning help foster resilience and preparedness for life and work (Skills Development Scotland, 2015). However, this aspect of the curriculum requires more consistent attention and better alignment with learner's needs and aspirations (OECD, 2021).

6.3 Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport (PEPAS)

PEPAS has evolved far beyond the traditional gym class. Across the UK and internationally, there's a growing recognition that it isn't just about fitness or sports performance—it's a vehicle for holistic child development. In Scotland, for instance, the curriculum has shifted toward a broader conception of HWB, encompassing mental, emotional, social, and physical domains. Yet,

this shift hasn't been seamless. Teachers often find themselves navigating conflicting discourses: on one hand, public health goals push for measurable outcomes like increased physical activity to combat childhood obesity; on the other, there's a push for social and emotional learning (SEL), which is harder to quantify but arguably more transformative (Wright, Gray, & Richards, 2020). The result? A complex landscape where educators must balance performance metrics with personal growth.

Interestingly, research shows that while many PE teachers support the idea of holistic health, their practice often defaults to traditional models—sports-based, competitive, and focused on physical outcomes (Wright, Gray, & Richards, 2020). This isn't necessarily resistance; it's often due to curriculum ambiguity, lack of training, or institutional pressures.

The OECD's international curriculum analysis (OECD, 2019) adds another layer, highlighting how countries like Scotland and Wales are ahead in integrating SEL and inclusive physical education, while others still lean heavily on physical fitness as the primary goal. But even in progressive contexts, there's a tension between policy ideals and classroom realities.

6.4 Relationships

Strong, nurturing relationships are essential to supporting emotional development and fostering positive school climates. The HWB curriculum's emphasis on mutual respect, community engagement, and peer connection underpins its effectiveness in promoting holistic learner growth (Education Scotland, 2017).

6.5 Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP)

The RSHP curriculum is praised for improving learners' understanding of healthy relationships, inclusivity, and emotional literacy. While practitioner confidence is growing, variability in delivery and limited resource support remain concerns for consistent implementation (Scottish Government, 2022).

6.6 HWB and the Digital World

Recent research (Oxford Internet Institute, 2023; Odgers, 2024) shows minimal impact of screen time on adolescent wellbeing, even before bed, challenging assumptions that digital habits directly harm mental health. Broader factors—like family, social, and economic pressures—play a major role. Social media can offer positive support, especially for vulnerable youth (Males, 2024), enhancing communication and emotional literacy. Odgers (2024) emphasises that it's not inherently harmful and calls for more research, open dialogue, and digital education.

OECD (2024) warns that multitasking and non-academic browsing can distract students and hinder focus. Their data also links lower wellbeing with increased risky online behaviour, reinforcing the need to address this within the curriculum's Responsibility of All (RoA). The Scottish Government (2024) encourages schools to develop mobile device policies suited to local

needs to support wellbeing. Altogether, the evidence supports integrating digital literacy, tailored guidance, and proactive wellbeing strategies into HWB education

6.7 Food and Health

Scotland faces ongoing dietary challenges, with high rates of overweight and obesity—particularly in deprived communities—linked to overconsumption of energy-dense foods and drinks. While the HWB curriculum includes nutrition education, evidence shows it has limited impact on young people’s food choices due to widespread availability, affordability, and marketing of unhealthy options.

School food regulations introduced in 2020 (Scottish Government, 2021) and updated in 2023 require schools to promote health through balanced meals and limited access to foods high in sugar, salt, and fat. Reports suggest that improvements in school food environments can positively influence student behaviours, including encouraging them to remain on campus at lunch (McKendrick, 2022; McKendrick et al., 2023). However, issues such as low uptake of Free School Meals (FSM), poor pupil awareness, and inconsistent implementation hinder progress. Surveys of young people’s eating habits reveal declining trends in healthy behaviours, with lower fruit and vegetable intake and increasing consumption of energy drinks and sweets. Healthier habits are more common in higher-income families, exposing the link between diet and social inequality (Food Standards Scotland, 2020; Obesity Action Scotland, 2025). Food insecurity is tied to poor mental health and low income, disproportionately affecting groups like single parents and younger adults.

A whole-systems approach is recommended to tackle diet-related health issues—promoting healthier choices through school and community initiatives, policy alignment, and better communication. Teachers and pupils value food education, especially practical cooking lessons, but report stress, time constraints, and gaps in policy awareness (McKendrick et al., 2023). Research also calls for more diverse, affordable, and culturally relevant food content to better meet learners’ needs.

6.8 Link Between HWB and Academic Achievement

Evidence confirms a strong relationship between pupil wellbeing and academic attainment. Initiatives such as SHINE (Scottish schools' health and wellbeing improvement research network [SHINE], n.d.) and the Attainment Scotland Fund (Scottish Government, 2024) suggest that strategic investment in HWB can narrow the attainment gap and support learner success across educational stages. The case for HWB as a driver of educational equity continues to strengthen.

6.9 Substance Misuse

Substance misuse education in Scotland faces both challenges and opportunities. While school-based alcohol programmes improve knowledge, their evidence on decision-making is limited, highlighting the need for more comprehensive approaches. Outdated initiatives such as Choices for Life reinforce the urgency for updated resources. Effective education must target multiple risk behaviours, build life skills, and promote self-esteem (OECD, 2024; Spratt, 2017). Supportive

school environments—where positive relationships with peers and staff exist—play a key role in prevention (Education Scotland, 2017; Holt et al., 2024). Reliance on testimonial-style education is discouraged, as research shows it can be counterproductive (NFER, 2023). Expanding professional education around addiction and incorporating lived experiences are vital steps forward.

Innovative models like the Icelandic Prevention Model (About Planet Youth Scotland, 2019) offer promise through community-driven, data-informed strategies, though they are still in early stages of implementation in Scotland. Survey data highlights that strong school and family engagement reduces substance misuse rates, but disparities persist, with higher misuse and death rates linked to socioeconomic deprivation and gender across various council areas.

Rising rates of alcohol-specific and drug-related deaths (National Records of Scotland, 2024a, 2024b) underscore the need for holistic responses—integrating curriculum reform, workforce training, and broader community support to help young people make informed decisions and address wider social factors.

7 Future Trends

This section aims to use evidence and predictions available to outline future global trends, relating these to the likely impact on Scotland and its education system. Given that one of the aims of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle is to co-create a future-oriented curriculum, the trends in this section, whilst not certain, offer some insights for consideration.

Some of the challenges facing the world, common to many future looking reports and analyses include:

- Rising global conflict (PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD, 2025a)
- Climate change, biodiversity loss and reduced food security (Patton et al., 2016; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a&b)
- Rise in mental health concerns and obesity (especially in young people) (Patton et al., 2016; OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Aging populations (Scottish Government, 2025; PWC, 2024)
- Technological disruption and polarisation via increased use of AI and emerging technologies (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a)
- Widening inequalities (including concentration of wealth, social instability and health inequalities) (Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government 2025; OECD, 2020; OECD 2025a)
- Rising costs of living (World Economic Foundation, 2025).

It is also important to note that trends identified are likely to affect children and young people differently, or disproportionately, compared with impacts for older generations. This is, in part, because children and young people must live with the outcomes of identified trends for longer, and the long-term future has particular importance for those who are youngest now (Scottish Government, 2025). They are increasingly exposed to conflict, displacement, environmental degradation, and unregulated commercial exploitation, especially in digital and food environments, as well as being the first generation to grow up under the 'shadow of climate change' (Patton et al., 2016).

Young people may also experience societal transformations differently from older generations because they are often at the leading edge of change or technology adoption. The trends will also have differential impacts for different equalities groups. Intersecting inequalities and disadvantage may reduce resilience or the ability of both households and communities to adapt to future challenges, or to take advantage of future opportunities. In many cases the trends have the potential to drive and deepen inequalities still further (Scottish Government, 2025).

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for a future-oriented curriculum:

- Curriculum flexibility and personalisation- a modern curriculum that is fit for purpose, meets individual aspirations, and delivers a just society that meets climate goals and achieves strong economic future (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)

- Learner agency and co-agency- ownership of their learning and being able to navigate uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Patton et al., 2016)
- Empowerment - education is positioned as a key driver for enabling individuals and communities to understand environmental challenges and take informed, responsible action (OECD, 2025b)
- Bodies and minds- the need for socio-emotional learning, digital wellbeing, and health literacy across all age groups (OECD 2025a; Patton et al., 2016)
- Transformative competencies- go beyond subject knowledge to include attitudes, ethics, and values allowing learners to create new value, reconcile tensions and dilemmas, and take responsibility (OECD, 2020)
- Skills such as AI and big data- analytical thinking, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility and agility, and technological literacy are not only considered critical now but are also projected to become even more important (World Economic Forum, 2025; OECD, 2020) as well as green skills (OECD, 2025b)
- Continued relevance of human-centric skills amid rapid technological advances- leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning, systems thinking, talent management, and motivation and self-awareness are considered important for this (World Economic Forum, 2025)
- Equity and inclusion- curriculum design must address widening inequalities (for example via intercultural understanding) and ensure access to meaningful learning for all, regardless of background or circumstance (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a)
- Broader educational goals- education should promote individual and collective wellbeing, sustainability, and social cohesion—not just academic achievement or economic productivity. Therefore, encouraging society to value all educational pathways and destinations is key (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024).

These trends reflect a global shift toward education systems that are necessarily more adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented—principles that align closely with Scotland’s Curriculum Improvement Cycle. They encourage co-creation and learner agency as well as reflecting learners’ lived realities while preparing them for emerging challenges.

8 Points to Consider

The evidence discussed in this paper surfaces several recurring themes that may be of relevance to stakeholders engaging in the CIC. Issues such as variability in delivery, curricular positioning, and pupil engagement—particularly across stages and settings—feature consistently. Points relating to equity, systemic factors, and the lived experience of learners also emerge, suggesting areas that may benefit from closer consideration. These findings do not represent definitive conclusions but rather identify aspects of current practice that could be explored further through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative planning during the CIC process.

Systemic Challenges

The evidence highlights systemic issues that warrant deeper reflection during the CIC process. While awareness of HWB has grown, its integration across subjects, support structures, and school culture remains uneven. There is also concern about consistency in HWB delivery across schools and local authorities, suggesting the need to embed HWB not only in curriculum content, but within school policies, routines, and learning environments. Strengthening links between education and community services—particularly during transitions such as P7–S1 and the move out of school—could support more coherent practice.

Personal and Social Education (PSE)

PSE, particularly in secondary education, emerges as an area where current delivery may not fully meet learner needs. Primary and ELC settings benefit from a more holistic approach, with HWB principles embedded across daily learning. In contrast, secondary PSE is often limited to 50 minutes per week, constraining its ability to respond meaningfully to complex topics such as mental health, substance misuse, relationships, and equality. This disparity underscores the need for a more consistent approach across all learning stages.

Emerging Trends

The HWB curriculum—and PSE in particular—is increasingly called upon to address a growing array of urgent and complex societal issues. From vaping, knife crime, and water safety to sunbed use, eating disorders, extremism, and online misogyny, schools are expected to respond swiftly and sensitively to emerging trends that directly impact the safety, wellbeing, and development of children and young people. These topics are not peripheral; many are matters of life and death. They demand thoughtful, evidence-informed, and age-appropriate engagement with learners. However, the current structure of PSE—often limited to a single 50-minute session per week, if timetabled at all—raises a critical dilemma: how can schools meaningfully address such a vast and evolving body of content within such limited curricular space? This tension underscores a broader issue: the HWB curriculum is saturated with essential content, and each academic year brings new challenges that require attention. Without dedicated time, professional development, and structural support, schools are left to make difficult choices about what to prioritise—often at the expense of depth, continuity, or responsiveness. This tension highlights a broader issue: HWB is often positioned as an add-on rather than a central component of the curriculum. In many settings, its integration across subjects and school culture appears limited, and the time allocated to PSE may not reflect the breadth or urgency of the topics it is expected to cover. The volume and significance of emerging issues—many of which have serious implications for young people's

safety and wellbeing—raise questions about how schools can realistically respond within current structures. These observations suggest a need for continued reflection on how HWB is prioritised, supported, and delivered across the education system.

Curriculum Relevance and Learner Engagement

Traditional, knowledge-based instruction (e.g. dietary advice or anti-smoking messages) lacks impact when delivered in isolation. Applied learning—through real-world problem-solving, reflection, and contextually relevant experiences—is essential to engage diverse learners and make HWB content meaningful. Participatory approaches—such as youth-led initiatives, digital storytelling, and advisory councils—show promise but are under-utilised.

Substance Misuse Education

Scotland's worsening relationship with drugs and alcohol, marked by some of the highest substance-related death rates in Europe, demands an urgent and transformative educational response. Substance misuse education must evolve from outdated awareness models to inclusive, evidence-informed strategies that address multiple risk behaviours, build resilience, and promote life skills. Especially in areas of deprivation, where harm is concentrated, fostering positive relationships and trust within school communities is essential. Effective substance education requires a whole-school, cross-sector approach. Teachers must be equipped with up-to-date resources, professional support, and confidence to deliver sensitive content. Fear-based or testimonial methods have proven ineffective, while innovative models like Planet Youth show potential—if properly evaluated and adapted to Scottish contexts. Policy coherence, community partnerships, and improved public health alignment are all essential for long-term impact.

Food Education

Scotland faces a deepening public health crisis linked to poor diet and childhood obesity. National and international reports (including the Lancet Commission) highlight the growing prevalence of diet-related conditions. Despite this urgency, Home Economics remains marginalised, with limited access to hands-on cookery due to facilities and funding. Secondary students value cooking and its link to health and wellbeing, but their learning experiences are inconsistent. A stronger commitment to food education—paired with meaningful facilities and support—is critical.

Physical Education

Evidence considered in this paper suggests that in ELC and primary settings, continued adherence to the Scottish Government's minimum PE entitlement (two hours weekly), combined with enhanced professional development and clearer guidance, may contribute to more engaging and holistic HWB education while potentially addressing declining physical activity levels.

Teacher Readiness

Finally, teacher readiness, access to relevant and updated materials, and ongoing mechanisms for evaluating impact remain key considerations. Embedding reflective practices in teaching and combining qualitative and quantitative insights will be vital in refining HWB delivery. These components will help ensure curriculum currency and responsiveness to Scotland's evolving health and wellbeing landscape.

Collectively, the evidence points to a complex and nuanced landscape in which the delivery of HWB is influenced by a range of factors. These factors include variations in policy interpretation, educator readiness, resource allocation, and the diverse lived experiences of children and young people. Given the central role that HWB plays in supporting not only academic outcomes but also lifelong mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing, ensuring its effective implementation is crucial. The stakes are high: when HWB is inconsistently delivered, children and young people's access to meaningful support, early intervention, and preventative education can be compromised. The themes raised through this analysis highlight the need for careful consideration by stakeholders at all levels. The CIC process offers a timely and valuable opportunity to examine these issues in greater depth and to develop more coherent, inclusive, and responsive approaches. By aligning curriculum development with the real and evolving needs of children and young people, there is potential to strengthen both health & wellbeing outcomes and educational equity across Scotland.

9 Declaration

The content of this document was written by the author, exercising full professional judgement. Education Scotland approved AI tools were used to support review, clarity, and quality assurance. Education Scotland staff retain full responsibility and have reviewed and approved all content.

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Version History

Version	Date	Detail
Version 1	6 March 2026	First published
Version 2	18 May 2026	Update to Executive Summary to correct the number of Higher PE entries.
		The section on National Data Sets p3 – p19 has been updated to ensure the language used is consistent with the language used by Qualification Scotland.
		Addition of Declaration on the use of AI.
		Update p48 to correct the number of participants in Active Schools.

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330
E enquiries@educationscotland.gov.scot

www.education.gov.scot

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