**RECOMMENDATIONS Recommendations for next steps: Focusing on student learning progress**

**Recommendation 1. Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from ages 3 to 18 years**

1.1. Re-assess CfE’s aspirational vision against emerging trends in education

Scotland should re-examine CfE’s aspirational vision in meaning and practice to take account of developments in education and society over the past two decades, along with emerging trends. The core message of CfE remains relevant and inspirational for its bold, future-oriented approach. It has served as an example to many other countries, and its key message strongly resembles the global vision on education as expressed in the Education 2030 vision of the OECD (the Learning Compass), developed through research and peer exchanges. Scotland worked to refresh the narrative around CfE and develop its benchmarks. However, there still seem to be mismatches between the vision and some of CfE’s building blocks. CfE was characterised to the OECD team as a “clash between 19th century assessment and 21st century curriculum”, which seems to have contributed to the evolution of several interpretations of CfE’s vision. Moreover, although CfE remains future-oriented in spirit, it is important to acknowledge the changes that have occurred both in education and society since CfE’s inception.

1.2. Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE

The aspirations for broad and rich (or “deep”) education for all learners should remain a strength of the Scottish education system. Scotland should find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE to deliver on its commitment to provide all learners with a rich learning experience throughout school education. Making the role of knowledge in CfE more explicit as part of the vision (see Recommendation 1.1) will start the conversation on breadth and depth of learning, but additional decisions are needed at several levels regarding the design of CfE. Scotland could consider how the design of CfE can better help learners consolidate a common base of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the end of BGE, and nurture and hone this base for them to progress seamlessly through the Senior Phase and the choices its offers.

1.3. Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE

Scotland could consider adapting the pedagogical and assessment practices and the structure of learning pathways in the Senior Phase to enhance learners’ experience of upper-secondary education in line with the aspirations of CfE’s four capacities. While re-assessing and perhaps readjusting the CfE vision will lessen the mismatches between the Senior Phase and the vision of CfE, it will also help to bridge the gap that students face in their transition from BGE to the Senior Phase. In particular, the adjustments should include considerations on the role of knowledge in the vision of CfE, emphasising its importance for learning along with skills and broader competencies, and clarifying its particular role in 21st century curricula (as opposed to traditional curriculum models). This would also contribute to correcting imbalances between breadth and depth present in the Senior Phase. In addition, challenges exist for curriculum and subsequent assessment re-design in the Senior Phase, which should be better integrated in the CfE framework. This task needs broad and active involvement of representatives from further and higher education and from the world of work. Without addressing these challenges, the practices in the Senior Phase may continue to lag in the essential curriculum components (aims, pedagogy and assessment) and continue to have a counterproductive influence on Broad General Education.

First, Scotland needs to create more coherence and alignment within the Senior Phase, between the curricular vision, learning goals, pedagogy and assessment approaches. Second, the Senior Phase needs to offer a clear structure for the diversity of pathways it offers to learners.

1.4. Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research

Scotland should continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research. It should do so by developing the environment of curriculum design support around schools, including in supporting exchange and collaboration between practitioners for curriculum design and experimentation within and across schools, and collaboration between schools and universities.

**Recommendation 2. Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities**

2.1. Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE

System leaders at Scotland’s national and local levels could continue encouraging the involvement of stakeholders (and in particular, students) with CfE through well-structured and clearly defined engagement initiatives. Stakeholders need to see how their contributions are used in the consultation and how their engagement informs actions and decisions. Their involvement with CfE should follow a stable and purposeful approach that results in effective contributions to decision making. Currently, the sheer number of “invited” engagement mechanisms by system leaders, and of stakeholders’ own initiatives blur the landscape, work against the effective inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes, and lessen the truly collaborative approach that Scotland could benefit from to enhance CfE implementation. With CfE in place for over a decade, system leaders with stakeholders should adopt a more stable and structured approach to involvement. For instance, and in keeping with Recommendation 3.4 made below about review cycles, opportunities for stakeholder involvement could be built within an overarching review cycle, which could help make stakeholders’ input more impactful.

Successful involvement requires clarity of purpose and an engagement design that reflects this purpose. Second, system leaders should also fulfil the promise of genuine stakeholder engagement and let stakeholders’ feedback, insight, and contributions to collaborative endeavour influence decision making in a transparent way.

2.2. Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE

Scotland’s system leaders and stakeholders could revise the current allocation of responsibility for CfE, including responsibilities for its strategic direction, its reviews and updates, and the response to schools’ needs for support with curriculum issues.

2.3. Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE

System leaders should develop a communication strategy about CfE and collaborate with practitioners, scholars and other CfE stakeholders as they do so.

**Recommendation 3. Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change**

3.1. Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level

Scotland has made considerable progress in enhancing the quality of school leadership and in professional learning across the school system. Supporting a curriculum as ambitious as CfE into the future, and ensuring that all learners engage in and benefit from high-quality learning experiences will require sustained support for school personnel. Other recommendations in this section will be relevant in that context; better alignment and transitions and a more coherent policy environment should make for a less bureaucratic and more streamlined system for all and give school leaders more time to lead curriculum making in their own schools. While teacher workload was not raised in discussions with the OECD team, teacher time was. In that context, in support of the next phase of development of CfE, the OECD team recommends the provision of additional, dedicated and ring-fenced time for all teachers, for curriculum planning, for monitoring of student achievement and in support of moderation of assessment outcomes.

3.2. Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence

Scotland should consider policy and institutional simplification, including ending or combining some policy initiatives and strategic frameworks around CfE. The system shocks caused by the current pandemic provide an opportunity for simplification and consolidation so that the efforts of school and system leadership can be re-focused on student learning, which is at the heart of CfE. This simplification should extend to institutions and agencies in the education policy system in Scotland. The OECD team is conscious that many of the agencies and organisations working across education in Scotland are themselves the products of reviews or consultation processes or consequences of public sector funding challenges. However, the team believes that a tipping point has now been reached. There is a risk that some previous structural changes to support the implementation of CfE may now be a barrier to its future development. It is possible to sustain stakeholder engagement and support, and strong deliberative processes while at the same time having fewer organisations and perhaps fewer but more focused and meaningful consultation processes.

3.3. Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of Building the Curriculum 5

Aligning qualifications, system evaluation and curriculum to deliver on the commitment of Building the Curriculum 5 is essential. Scotland could first identify and develop approaches to student assessment that could be used in school and external settings at Senior Phase levels, in alignment with the four capacities and CfE philosophy. Second, Scotland could re-develop a sample-based evaluation system to collect robust and reliable data necessary to support curriculum reviews and decision making. Actions in two areas are needed to support the assessment framework outlined in 2011. The first concerns qualifications in the Senior Phase. The second concerns the commitment to ongoing monitoring of local and national progress and achievement.

3.4. Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review

Scotland could consider establishing a systematic curriculum review cycle with a planned timeframe and specific review agenda, led by the specialist stand-alone agency proposed in Recommendation 3.2.

**Recommendation 4. Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view**

Building on the system’s existing strengths, Scotland should consider how to take on board the recommendations in this report as a coherent package rather than individual policy actions for shaping the next steps. Leading the change process itself will require reinforcing the stability, trustworthiness and effectiveness of the decision-making processes, especially to define the next steps of CfE: what needs to be done, by whom, when and how it will be measured. On this last point, Scotland should consider setting up the metrics needed to understand progress with implementing CfE actions over the long run.

The OECD team proposes that Scotland reviews the recommendations through an actionable lens, provided in Table 5.2, and suggests the following action plan:

1.Start by re-assessing the vision of CfE to take on board social and economic developments, emerging trends in education and up-to-date research (Recommendation 1.1).

2.Define the indicators that can support progress with the implementation and impact of CfE (Recommendations 1.1 and 1.4) and establish a communication strategy that can be updated to support CfE’s developments (Recommendation 2.3).

3.Revise the roles and responsibilities of those stakeholders involved in CfE (Recommendation 2.2). This will include defining the concrete role of the institution that should take the main responsibility for CfE (Recommendation 3.2). This institution can then establish a systematic approach to curriculum review (Recommendation 3.4) and set up consultations to explore a range of issues raised in this assessment: the balance of knowledge across the different stages of CfE (Recommendation 1.2), between breadth and depth of learning (Recommendation 1.3).

4.Work on developing the approach to stakeholder engagement with CfE ensuring stability, purpose and impact (Recommendation 2.1).

5.Work with SQA and other related institutions, including consultations, to consolidate an assessment system that aligns with the CfE vision and student learning needs (Recommendation 3.3).

6.In parallel, discussions on teacher and school leadership time and professional development needs may be organised by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland (Recommendation 3.1).

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