INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATION ADVISERS

THE SENIOR PHASE CURRICULUM

PAPER BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Purpose

1. This paper sets out the original aspirations on the Senior Phase curriculum (ages 15-18) under Curriculum for Excellence and provides a brief overview of how this has been developed in practice, as well as emerging opportunities and challenges. It is not intended to provide a full analysis of implementation, but to support discussion by the International Council of Education Advisers on the Senior Phase curriculum.

Introduction

2. The recent focus on the Senior Phase curriculum by academics, the media and the Scottish Parliament Education & Skills Committee has highlighted a number of questions in relation to the Senior Phase. On 16 September the the Deputy First Minister announced that he will commission an independent review of how Curriculum for Excellence is being implemented for young people in S4-S6 to identify any improvements that might be made.[1]

3. We are in the very early stages of scoping this review and it would be helpful at this point to have the views of the ICEA on the emerging questions and what such a review should cover.

Background to the Senior Phase

4. *Building the Curriculum 3* (2008) set out the broad framework for learning and teaching, including the entitlement to a Broad General Education to the end of S3, followed by a three-year Senior Phase.

5. Alongside the overarching entitlement to a Senior Phase where learners can continue to develop the four capacities and also obtain qualifications, the paper was clear that the Senior Phase curriculum should:

- meet the needs of all learners, whether aspiring to achievements at SCQF level 1 or at SCQF level 7;
- comprise more than programmes which lead to qualifications;
- have a continuing emphasis on health and wellbeing;
- provide opportunities for personal achievement, service to others and practical experience of the world of work.

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[1] https://news.gov.scot/news/review-of-senior-phase

6. These entitlements represented a clear and deliberate broadening of the focus to beyond exams and traditional qualifications.

7. This broader focus has been strengthened by the introduction of **Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy** in 2014. This aims to reduce youth unemployment by 40% by 2021 and to ensure that all young people are able to undertake relevant work-related learning as part of their curriculum 3-18, regardless of their learning pathway, future career aspirations, gender or background.

8. The importance of this broader offer in supporting many young people into a positive destination post school was clearly articulated by young people themselves as part of the **15-24 Learner Journey Review** in 2017/18, which has led to work being developed to better signpost the full offer available to young people in the senior phase.

The Senior Phase curriculum in practice

9. The purpose of Curriculum for Excellence is to provide young people with the skills, knowledge and experiences that will prepare them for their life beyond school and provide them with the best possible opportunity to fulfil their potential.

10. Under the Senior Phase (from S4 to S6), young people are able to acquire a range of qualifications and awards over that three year period. There have been no pre-conceived notions about which qualifications were to be taken at which stage of the senior phase; the guiding principle has been that qualifications are taken at the appropriate stage for the individual young person over the three years of the Senior Phase. This flexibility, along with the school empowerment agenda, has led to variation across schools in Scotland, with schools themselves making decisions on the best models for their young people.

11. This has represented an intended fundamental shift from the pre-CfE curriculum. As part of the current Senior Phase arrangements, it means that young people might take fewer qualifications – particularly at levels 3, 4 and 5 - than they did under the previous offer (Standard Grade). It means that the design of the Senior Phase will look different from school to school. The most recent figures on school leaver attainment and destinations and vocational provision are set out in Annex A.

12. Young people are also accessing a broader offer in their Senior Phase, reflecting their different learning styles and career aspirations. Under DYW we have seen an increase in the uptake of vocational qualifications available to those in the Senior Phase year on year and the emergence of a school based apprenticeship offer as part of the growing Apprenticeship Family (pre-apprenticeships, Foundation Apprenticeships, Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Level Apprenticeships). Over 54,000 skills-based qualifications have also been achieved in 2019, providing learners with the skills to help their routes into employment, further or higher education – this figure is more than double than in 2012 (from 24,849 in 2012 to 54,406 in 2019).

13. In order to deliver this breadth of learning, schools are designing and delivering a bespoke three-year Senior Phase jointly with a range of key partners, including colleges, employers, universities and Community Learning and Development.

14. From Education Scotland inspections and engagement work, we know that the schools that have made most progress in designing a three year Senior Phase have several common features of practice. They will have:

- used data on their school community to help shape the offer;
- engaged – during the BGE- with young people to understand their motivations and aspirations;
- developed local and/or digital partnerships that will enable them to extend the offer for young people and can be sustained over time as needed;
- expanded the range of awards and qualifications beyond the 'traditional' offer;
- started to use the SCQF to plan out links between qualifications and awards and to support their development of learning pathways for individuals and groups;
- involved and informed parents in the process of development; and
- supported young people and parents to be aware of possibilities and options long before the traditional option choice stage.

15. Some examples of how this is working in practice are included at Annex B.

16. However, we also know from Education Scotland's *Quality Improvement in Scottish Education* that "some establishments and services have not adapted and developed their curriculum as quickly or coherently as expected.[2]"

Challenges/ Recent debate

17. In the course of 2018, the approaches to the Senior Phase curriculum have been widely debated – in the media, by academics and through the Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee Inquiry into Subject Choice. There have been a number of key themes running throughout the written submissions to the Committee and the evidence sessions themselves. In particular:

- The Senior Phase curriculum offer in S4 and equality of the offer across the country, given that a growing numbers of schools are offering more bespoke options choices to match learner needs across S4-S6
- Impact of different Senior Phase approaches on attainment/ outcomes e.g. more young people taking a wide range of qualifications may mean fewer national qualifications passes in total each year.
- Impact of approaches to learning and teaching
- Coherence between the Broad General Education and Senior Phase
- Impact on specific subjects e.g. from learners studying for fewer qualifications in S4 (norm was 8 subjects for most learners in S4 before CfE)

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[2] Education Scotland (2017) – *'Quality and Improvement in Scottish Education 2012-2016'* p53

- Understanding of the purpose of the Senior Phase
- Pace of change

18. However, there have also been clear voices of support, from local authorities in particular, noting that under CfE:
- There is a much wider range of appropriate pathways available to young people (Clackmannanshire Council)
- The structure of the senior phase has enabled better learning and achievement than before (Fife Council)
- Because the Senior Phase combines S4/5/6, this has created far greater timetable flexibility … The greater flexibility of the timetable has been matched by increasing option choice…Taken overall, it is clear that the same wide range of subjects is available to pupils as was in 2014 (Aberdeenshire Council)
- Schools are increasingly offering more flexible routes and a range of qualifications e.g. National 4/5, National Progression Awards, Skills for work courses etc. (City of Edinburgh Council).
- The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence has resulted in improved outcomes for young people. The breadth of provision, particularly for young people who do not intended to access Higher Education has improved (South Lanarkshire Council)

Next steps

19. The Education and Skills Committee published its report on the Senior Phase Subject Choice Inquiry on Monday 16 September.[3] This report also broadly focuses on the themes outlined at paragraph 17 and makes a number of recommendations, in particular that:

- **substantial work must be undertaken by the Scottish Government to develop a better understanding of how subject choices operate in practice and to address the unintended consequences emanating from the change in curriculum.**

- **that fresh research be commissioned in a number of particular areas, including:**
  - an independent review of the Senior Phase
  - research on the impact of different curricular models
  - research on the number subjects offered by schools in each year of the Senior Phase (S4-S6)

20. As noted previously, the Deputy First Minister has announced a review of the Senior Phase and, in addition to the Committee Report, we have a range of other evidence available to us at a national level that will feed into this. Over the last academic session, 2018/19, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland have gathered evidence on the secondary curriculum, from Education Scotland

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[3] https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/ES/2019/9/16/Subject-choices-in-schools

Inspection and engagement work, as well as engagement work on Developing the Young Workforce and the 15-24 Learner Journey Programme.

21. As part of the [Research Strategy for Scottish Education](), we have recently undertaken a survey of headteachers in all Scottish secondary schools to gather their views and experiences of implementing the Senior Phase curriculum. The report from this research will be published within the next few weeks and will be the first phase in a wider research project on the Senior Phase.

22. In a separate, although aligned, activity, we are also working with national and local partners to undertake a full analysis of the 2019 SQA results

Points for discussion

23. The Council is invited to offer:
- **Its observations on the successes and challenges around the Senior Phase curriculum**
- **Its views in relation to what a review of the Senior Phase curriculum might helpfully cover**
- **International experiences that could inform our thinking in this area**

Learning Directorate
September 2019

KEY DATA

School leaver attainment and destinations

- Under Curriculum for Excellence, there are no set notions about the number or types of qualifications taken at each stage of the senior phase.
- What matters is the qualifications and awards that pupils leave school with - not just what they study in S4.
- An overwhelming majority of pupils now remain in school for S5 and S6 (almost two thirds leave in S6)

School leaver attainment for leaver cohorts 2012/13 to 2017/18

		2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
SCQF Level 5 or better	1 pass or more	82.7%	84.3%	85.2%	85.6%	86.1%	85.9%
	5 passes or more	54.6%	56.5%	56.2%	56.0%	56.7%	57.4%
SCQF Level 6 or better	1 pass or more	55.8%	58.1%	60.2%	61.7%	61.2%	62.2%
	5 passes or more	25.9%	28.1%	28.6%	29.7%	29.9%	30.4%

- A greater proportion of school leavers attained 1 pass or more at Level 5 or better and at level 6 or better, in 2017/18 compared to 2012/13
- Similarly, a greater proportion attained 5 passes or more at Level 5 or better in 2017/18 than in 2012/13
- Most notably, there has been a year on year increase in the proportion of school leavers attaining 5 passes or passes at Level 6 or better between 2012/13 and 2017/18

Percentage of school leavers by initial destination category, 2012/13 to 2017/18

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Positive initial destination	91.7%	92.5%	93.0%	93.3%	93.7%	94.4%

Percentage of school leavers by follow-up destination category, 2012/13 to 2017/18

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Positive follow-up Destinations	90.4%	91.7%	92.0%	91.4%	92.9%	93.2%

- There has also been a year on year increase in the proportion of school leavers going onto a positive (initial and follow-up) destination

Vocational provision for young people in the senior phase is growing

- The number of school leavers attaining vocational qualifications at Level 5 and above has increased from 7.3% in 2013/14 to 14.8% in 2017/18.
- Over 54,000 skills-based qualifications, awards and certificates have been achieved this year (2019), more than double the figure attained in 2012 (from 24,849 to 54,406).
- Since 2014 rates of attainment in Awards have been increasing, with a 38.1% increase in the number of Level 5 Awards and a 26.5% increase in the number of Level 6 Awards. Example of an Award is the Personal Development Award.
- We have also seen a sizeable increase in National Progression Awards (NPAs), many of which are taken at school. Examples include Sports Coaching, Photography, Business with Technology and Cyber Security.

- Awards recognise the life and work skills learners gain from activities they may already be taking part in at school, college, or elsewhere — such as sport, mentoring, voluntary work, or fundraising activities

EXAMPLES OF SENIOR PHASE APPROACHES

The exemplars from three schools are presented here. They are:

1. Newbattle High School, Midlothian
2. Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire
3. Kingussie High School, Highland.

The following features are common in these examples:

- Offering a curriculum that has meaning for all young people in the school's community is seen as an equity issue for the leaders.
- Developments have included an expansion of the subject offer – initially at the senior phase stage - allowing more choice beyond the traditional menu of qualification courses. In Kingussie, for example, they doubled their menu over 4 years. This then allows for the design of more varied pathways.
- Communication with parents is seen as an ongoing and worthwhile challenge. The schools here have developed some interesting approaches.

Newbattle High School, Midlothian.

"Career ready, college ready, university ready and digitally ready"

Rationale:
Strong school vision developed with school community and partners. A full school community consultation took place in June 2017. For the month of June, HT was protected and transitioned with the previous Head Teacher. This allowed a review of the school through self-evaluative processes to create a forward leadership plan in consultation with staff, pupils, parent/carers and the wider community. For example, information was gathered from:

- Data on the school (patterns, trends, context of area, INSIGHT, attendance, exclusions…)
  - 77% SIMD 1-4
  - Over one third Additional Support Needs
  - Above average Free School Meal entitlement at 21%
  - High levels of disengagement and exclusion e.g. 152 exclusions in 2014 (54 pupils)
  - 85% attendance
  - Trends emerged that over a third of pupils (36%) entered directly into employment, yet the curriculum was set up for students aspiring to University only (15%). Around three quarters of young people, only, stayed on in either S5 or S6
- Meeting all staff one-to-one and then in faculties
- Meeting parent/carer groups
- Meeting pupil focus groups
- Meeting community partners
- Observing school practices and systems in action
- Consulting with partners e.g. Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Edinburgh University, Edinburgh College and businesses among others

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Consultation also involved specific events involving pupils (Primary through to S6 with Edinburgh University Professor Holly Linklater leading), parents/carers, partners and staff. Results backed up initial evidence, need for:

- More appropriate courses for S4 to attain and achieve
- Merge S4 as senior pupils in stage of learning and not confined to their age
- Too many subjects having a detrimental effect on the motivation of pupils (large numbers re-coursed or changed presentation levels)
- Remove column structures which were a barrier to young people's pathways
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Strong underpinning for the rationale of a Digital Centre for Excellence
- Digital literacy to be core in the curriculum

Design
- All pupils encouraged to stay on until the end of S6 to experience a full senior phase. S4 being part of a three year journey
- Curriculum will ensure that pupils are "career ready, college ready, university ready and digitally ready".
- Design took into account pathways for successful learner journeys, the school day and partner delivery
- Created more courses to run that traditionally did not have the uptake
- Barriers to accessing courses removed – poverty proofing the school (CDT, HE, Music tuition). It is a free school day
- Unique aspects include Digital Literacy, Pre-apprenticeship course as a subject choice, S2 and S3 together in employability electives
    - Change to BGE – employability electives, digital literacy
    - Changes to Senior Phase – vocationally recognised qualifications (Mountain Bike Mechanics), work-based learning, more partnership working: pre-apprenticeships, Edinburgh College

Impact to date
The impact of a correct curricular design and strong rationale can be demonstrated through attainment and achievement and has been notable also in the following for 2018-2019:

- Exclusions have significantly dropped to 9 (no LAAC) [Cf 70 in 2015/16]
- Attendance increased by close to 5% since 2017
- Better level of learner engagement in lessons as demonstrated by any guests
- Best stay on rate ever (91% S4 to S5 and 82% S5 to S6) [Cf. 72% and 69% respectively in 2015/16]
- Positive destinations above all of our comparators (VC, Midlothian, SEIC and National). Employment a better quality using modern apprenticeships in our curriculum. Also improved University entry by 9% (widening participation) and college entry by another 3%.
- Increased effective partnership working e.g. Edinburgh University shared resources, businesses, College delivery onsite, etc

BGE	Senior phase
• Clear pathways mapped out from S1 breadth and S2/S3 options to post - school e.g. Hospitality; FinTech Digital.	• Joint S4 to S6 model. • Senior Phase course booklet • Staff encouraged to deliver appropriate course from the full SCQF Framework, e.g. Level 5 Laboratory Skills

- S2 and S3 come together in classes in employability electives for 2 periods per week: choice of over 24. - Examples include: Digital Design and App Development; Construction; Mountain Bike, Drone Academy, Horse Care, Sound Production; Language Ambassadors. - Choice element at S3. Continued access to all curricular areas but choosing e.g. 1 social studies subject. - Masterclass option in S3 to study subject areas in more depth e.g. Science with Scientists - Digital literacy taught as a core subject across BGE.	- Level 6 NPAs - Specialist IT/digital teaching - Foundation Apprenticeships (S5) - South East Scotland Academies Programme - Work-Based Learning (leading to Apprenticeships) (S5/6) - Guided free choice using tracking system and career aspiration. - Opening up courses at level 4/5/6 instead of only National 4/5 - Over 70 subjects - In-school delivery of qualifications in partnership with Edinburgh College. - Progression in subjects for the three year senior phase linked from BGE

Calderglen High School, South Lanarkshire

"Working Together to Inspire Learning and Shape the Future"

Rationale:
Vision developed by the Curriculum Architecture Group (CAG) at the inception of the school in 2007. Vision is the foundation upon which curriculum is built. Team of teachers across a range of promotion levels, experience and age made up CAG. Worked in consultation with the wider staff, parent council and the wider parent body to arrive at a model which suited the needs of the pupils the school serves. Business and other sector partners informed discussions and were an asset in consultations and in ongoing curriculum development.
Current curriculum model informed by considerable amount of research which included discussions and visits with schools in UK and internationally.

Curriculum is centred around ensuring the holistic development of every child. All pupils are supported and challenged to reach their full potential. Shaped to enable young people develop the four capacities. At all stages a very clear strategy in place to allow the development of skills for life learning and work. Facilitated by fully using the 4 contexts for learning. The interdisciplinary (IDL) experience of pupils is varied and progressive across the BGE and allows development of a range of skills including creativity and critical thinking. Literacy and numeracy firmly embedded as responsibility of all staff. The extensive use of a range of partners local, national and global including local business, parents and former pupils to support learning enhances the experience of pupils and provides a real life context to their learning. Strong focus on wellbeing, growth mindset approaches and attention to tackling gender relevant issues eg such as impact on subject choice.

Design and ongoing development
At all stages the curriculum has a strong focus on the development of the child and their learner pathways and offers bespoke provision for individuals and groups of learners. Pupil voice has a clear role in shaping the curriculum. Vocational, skills based courses offered as Masterclass in BGE have been developed into Qualifications in the Senior phase. There is a strong emphasis on the continued development of new courses within

the Senior Phase. Our suite of qualifications is continually being updated and refreshed in line with relevant pathways for pupils and takes account of current labour market trends. Introduced 11+ new courses over last few years from BGE into senior phase. This allows all pupils to access a range relevant qualifications to including National Qualifications as well as the range of qualifications within the SCQF framework, which ensure that by the point of exit pupils have gained the skills and qualifications they need to ensure a positive sustained destination. Attention paid to ensuring relevance of subjects eg linking Modern Languages to DYW work.

Over the last 2 years our work with 2 schools in Italy and one in Poland, as part of a European Agency Project, has informed more recent changes in our curriculum. Our curricular model is constantly being evaluated and updated to ensure it continues to be effective in meeting the needs of changing groups of learners.

Impact to date:
- Insight data shows an increase in the % of pupils achieving a higher level of literacy and numeracy at the point of exit from school
- Increased bespoke programmes for pupils leading to increased qualifications and destinations for those pupils.
- Pupils leaving with more total tariff points that virtual comparators. This is particularly evident in the lower achieving cohorts in S4, S4 & S6 (Closing the gap)
- Leavers destinations are in the top 10 in Scotland
- Increasingly effective partnerships are shaping our thinking around a curriculum fit for purpose as well as an awareness of skills deficit and what we can do to address it.
- All Faculties now engage with partners to support skills development and shape curriculum offer
- Summer placements, social mobility funding and IWPS are helping to close the gap for our most vulnerable. In the current session 6 of our S5 students, including a learner with additional support needs have been offered Placements with the Nuffield Research Centre.
- The number of girls opting for PE has increased by 25% by introducing aesthetics PE, in which the activity has a different focus.
- GRADU 8 school College Programme has an increased uptake
- IDL had increased the engagement of young people with additional support needs
- Increase in number of girls choosing STEM subjects in S3. 2017/18 40% UCAS applications for STEM – 55% of these were girls.
- Increase on uptake of Modern Languages – ahead of comparator trends.

BGE	Senior phase
- Planned as a three year model. - Using BGE to shape the senior phase offer. - S1 and S2 : covering curriculum areas as follows; English, Maths. Mod Languages, Social subjects, Science, Art, Drama, Technical, IT, Music, HE. - Development of design thinking skills at S1. - IDL projects – eg STEM, entrepreneurship, global citizenship.	3 year model with 7 column choices in S4 and 6 columns over S5 and S6 - Growing qualification options: eg Cybersecurity, Laboratory sciences, Photography, Cosmetology, Scottish studies, Media studies, Lifeskills Maths, Practical Electronics - Apprenticeship programmes: - Foundation Apprenticeships (S5/6):

- S3 – English , Maths, ModLang, Social Subjects, Science, + 3 additional electives (from the other curriculum areas) + 2 Masterclasses per year - Masterclass choices: eg Sports Journalism, Leadership Academy, Sound Design, Patisserie, Cosmetology, Child Care. Some Masterclasses carry accreditation. Used also to provide learning base for further study and accreditation in senior phase. - Bespoke Courses for targeted groups: (Prince's Trust Achieve, Barista, Introduction to Workplace Skills).	- PSE continues across senior phase with opportunities for awards at S5/6 - Entrepreneurial workshops.

Kingussie High School
Developing practice example

Rationale: Focus on use of use of local environment and digital technologies**. '**Outdoor learning at heart of curriculum.' 'Rich Digital ethos' Strong partnership delivery with local and international links. Strong focus on support for young people. Looking to maximise opportunities presented by location/rurality, small school role and therefore related staffing constraints.

Impact:

BGE	**Senior phase**
S1 – all pupils have common core curriculum S2 – Addition of elective column to allow short course (8 weeks) choice eg Geography – Outdoor Learning; Technology (Sustainability); S3 – two elective columns – allows exploration of subject in depth. Taster sessions for possible SP choice. S1 – S3: Flexible afternoon: allows for IDL (eg Outdoor Learning); 1-1 interviews in S3 in preparation for SP choices. Strong focus on wider achievement supported by additional school 'club' activities.	- Moved from an offer of 20 options to 2013 to 46 by 2018. - S4 – S6 timetabled as one 6 column structure - Expectation of 6 choices in both S4 and S5 (and minimum of 5 in S6) - College learning - Work based learning - Foundation Apprenticeships - Saturday course options - Use of open and distance learning with UHI, OU - S6 options: access to 2 HNC (level7) eg Architectural Technology; and to 10 degree modules eg Intro to Business Law.