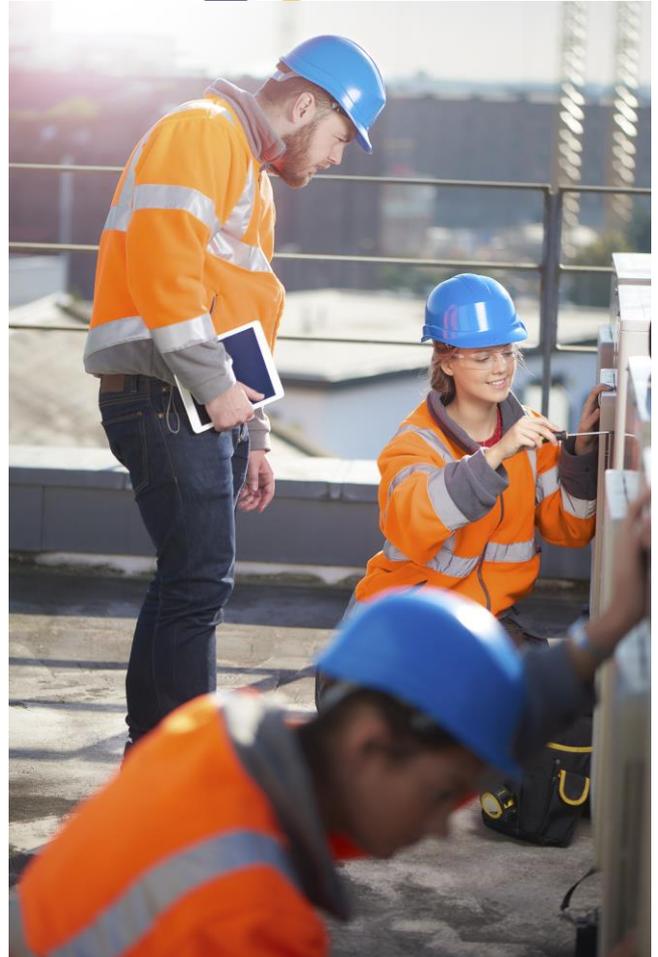




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School and Post-School Education 15-18

Moray House School of Education Election Briefings

Education from early years to 18
Research and Practice Contributing to Policy

15 April 2016

School and Post-School Education 15-18

Improvement in the life chances of Scotland's least advantaged young people is not a job for schools and education services alone. Other agencies and services are involved. To get the strategy right and improve opportunities, attainment and achievement for *all* young people, Scotland needs an inclusive wide-ranging national conversation about how as a society we can work together to improve the life chances of all our children and how we can best measure progress towards that goal. The 'Senior Phase' of Curriculum for Excellence (age 15-18) needs to be clearer about the educational entitlements of every young person growing up in Scotland, wherever they are pursuing their education. Without such clarity, the least advantaged are those most likely to lose out.

Key points for consideration

- Under Curriculum for Excellence, all young people are said to be entitled to education to age 18, but what we expect 15-18 year olds to learn and achieve by age 18 remains unspecified and unclear.
- The relationship between, and respective roles of, academic and vocational learning needs to be clarified.
- All students are entitled to participate in an educational programme of learning characterised by breadth, balance, and progression, yet currently some young people in Scotland do not experience that entitlement.
- Where learning in the Senior Phase takes place across different settings, planning, progression and co-ordination need to be given greater attention, particularly for those learners pursuing more individual pathways.
- The Senior Phase thus requires coherent educational framing to ensure **all** young people receive the broad and balanced education to which they are entitled through to age 18, not just in schools or educational institutions, but in all post-school settings. Such a framework could be provided, for example, by a unifying graduation certificate, specifying the entitlements to be delivered.
- As the Senior Phase goes forward, a parallel programme of independent longitudinal research on its impact is required to assess the extent to which its intentions are being realized in practice.

Briefing

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) has defined an entitlement for every child to a Broad General Education to age 15. While it has been stated that all young people in Scotland are entitled to continued education in the Senior Phase (age 15-18), that entitlement has not been defined. The broad ambition of Curriculum for Excellence effectively stops at age 15 and the progression into Senior Phase (15-18), with its very different pressures of competitive examinations and preparation for post-school destinations, lacks a coherent underpinning educational rationale. Every young Scot is said to be 'entitled' to education to age 18ⁱ, yet Scotland has not defined the character of an 'educated 18 year old', other than to say that each young person should progress into a 'positive sustained destination'.ⁱⁱ Some post-16 pathways are highly valued, have internal coherence and progression and are widely understood and supported, for example the pathway

through Higher into Higher Education. Other pathways are complicated, less transparent, not generally well understood and therefore more difficult to navigate.

CfE aims to enable innovation and development at the local level. However without an underpinning rationale, and with no definition of entitlement in the Senior Phase, each school, or local authority, has been left to develop the interface with Broad General Education (to age 15) and the progression options which result. A recent study suggests that there is already an unplanned narrowing of the academic curriculum at S4 in many schoolsⁱⁱⁱ and an increase in targeting of vocational options at those deemed less suited to academic study, as a result of the *Developing Young Workforce* (DYW) initiative^{iv}. These developments may be reducing the access of those from less advantaged backgrounds to broader educational opportunities and to higher level examination attainment. This early trend reinforces the importance of establishing a broad educational rationale for the Senior Phase and of ensuring that there are suitable systems to acquire accurate, relevant data on the impact of the various changes currently underway.

Despite the welcome injection of enthusiasm and funding for developments in vocational preparation in the Senior Phase following the report *Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*, Scotland has still not resolved the relationship between academic and vocational learning which was highlighted as problematic in the national debate^v, given priority in the OECD report of 2007, and identified by Scotland's leading expert in this field as a major difficulty in the design and implementation of DYW.^{vi}

Curriculum for Excellence aims to develop the 'four capacities', alongside 'skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.' Some of the settings in which young people pursue their learning to age 18 offer restricted educational experiences and limited opportunities to continue to develop these capacities and skills. An appropriate balance of general and vocational learning should be provided in all settings. This should include opportunities for non-certificated experiences. A fuller educational rationale, and appropriate operational arrangements, are required if the educational ambitions of the Senior Phase are to be realized for all, and not just those who remain in full-time education (in school or college).

A framework which brings together the different educational experiences offered in vocational, community and educational settings, is required. Young people aged 15-18 pursue their education in a variety of settings: school, college, training placement or work-based placement, in community learning settings or some combination of these. A clear educational vision and framework is required to ensure equity in access to educational entitlements to age 18. Such a framework can also help avoid problems of duplication of provision and repetition of learning, facilitate progression and ensure that young people's efforts are rewarded independently of location. Above all, such a vision and framework is needed to ensure that all provision retains a broad educational core. Such a framework can facilitate the planning and co-ordination of learning across different settings over time. It should also capture and value all the learning that has taken place.

One way of providing such a framework would be the development through piloting of a Graduation Certificate designed to recognise and reward different types of learning experience. This would be available to all learners, recognising different types of achievements and attainments originating in different locations.^{vii} The Scottish Government should initiate as a matter of urgency the design and trialing process of a unifying certification framework of this type to bring equity, coherence and educational balance into the Senior Phase^{viii}.

Discontinuities in governance also affect the learning of some young people disproportionately. Again, those most disadvantaged are likely to be most affected by such discontinuity. The Developing Young Workforce initiative, for example, was developed for, is supported by and reports to one Cabinet Secretary while the operation of academic examinations in the Senior Phase is reported to a different Cabinet Secretary. In addition to the discontinuities of curriculum progression that result, schools, colleges and other potential partners can be subject to different expectations and have different funding and reporting arrangements. This can cause unnecessary and sometimes obstructive operational complexity. If provision is fragmented, pathways sometimes repetitive and the 'entitlement' is not clearly defined, there is a risk those with the least social

capital, system knowledge and support will find it most difficult to understand the available pathways and their long-term implications. This is not just a question of individual advice for individual young people, important as that is, but of a wider civic knowledge, among parents, employers, educators and the wider community, of the character of the balanced and progressive educational experience to age 18 to which every young person growing up in Scotland is entitled.

Conclusions

The Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence, has been under-designed, under-evaluated and insufficiently supported by a national framework, outlining the key entitlements. In the absence of rich independent data on its implementation, and given its exclusion from the remit of the recent OECD investigation, there is a real danger that existing educational inequalities will be reinforced rather than addressed. A thorough programme of independent research into its impact, and further development of policy and practice, on the lines advocated here, is urgently required.

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- ⁱ Education Scotland n.d. *Senior Phase*, available at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatcanlearnersexpect/seniorphase.asp>, accessed 05.04.16
- ⁱⁱ Murphy D, Croxford, L, Howieson C and Raffe D (eds) (2015) *Everyone's Future*, London: Trentham/Institute of Education Press, p202
- ⁱⁱⁱ Scott, J. (2015) Structural Divergence, Curricular Distortion and Reduced Attainment, available at academia.edu, accessed 11.02.16
- ^{iv} Information and links are available on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/dyw/>, accessed 11.02.16
- ^v Munn, P., Stead, J., McLeod, G., Brown, J., Cowie, M., McCluskey, G., Pirrie, A., & Scott, J., (2004) 'Schools for the 21st century: the national debate on education in Scotland', *Research Papers in Education*, 19:4, 433-45.
- ^{vi} Murphy et al, op.cit. Chapters 4 and 5; Raffe, D. (2013) Comments on the Interim Report of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (Part 1), Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh (*CES Ref 1338*), available at <http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/publications/2013.htm>, accessed 24.02.16
- ^{vii} see for example Murphy (2014) *Schooling Scotland*, Edinburgh: Argyll Press, pp115-120
- ^{viii} Other parts of the United Kingdom are seeking to develop a unifying entitlement framework. See, for example, The *Welsh Baccalaureate* (<http://www.welshbaccalaureate.org.uk/Welsh-Baccalaureate-Home-Page>) and the English *Whole Education/Baccalaureate* under development by the Headteachers' Round Table (<https://headteachersroundtable.wordpress.com/2014/01/19/htrt-english-baccalaureate-trial-update-jan-2014/>).

Further information

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